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114 FIFTH AVENUE,
NEW YORK.

BY
HENRI BLOO

PROPERTY

OF

DON GILBAR



“Some twenty yards distant, reclining on a heap of skins, was a woman; her contour simply divine.”—Page 80.

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OF

DON GILBAR

BY

HENRI BLOCK

Wall.

AUTHOR OF

“BLAYLOCK AND BLYNN, PROMOTERS,” A NOVEL:

“DOWN IN TENNESSEE”;

“MERCED,”

A TALE OF THE SAN JAOQUIN.

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NEW YORK

AUTHORS' PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

114 FIFTH AVENUE

(1895)



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# PROPERTY OF DON GILBAR.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE weather had been threatening for several days. The moaning and sighing of the wind, the gathering of clouds—the elements in every way denoted, not so much a storm of an hour, as stormy weather for some time.

It was in the early part of December, and there had been very little stormy weather, as is usual in Central Iowa at this time of the year; but now the old farmers and their housewives felt that winter was coming and predicted that it would be of unusual severity. The husks had been thick on the corn, muskrats were plentiful in the streams and had been laying in abundant stores, as for a long winter; so that it had been a matter of surprise that there was no snow up to this time.

It was only a little after noon when old Squire Lykin, standing before the big sheet iron stove in his comfortable general room, was taking a final puff at his short clay pipe. The old Squire, although very well-to-do, never indulged in a more expensive luxury, as to pipes, than a nickel brown stone front with a reed stem; but said non-expensive luxury had long been a part of the Squire's well-known physiognomy in and about Pleasantville.

Squire Lykin had been a very handsome man in his



day and was still everything that the most critical eye could wish—a broad-shouldered, well-developed, typical stock-farmer. His face at the same time denoted the most genial hospitality and good will, while there was something about the mouth that so firmly grasped his short pipe, and his big black eyes, made darker by contrast with his full gray beard and hair, that commanded at once a feeling of affection and sympathy and denoted some heavy sorrow which he had plainly battled with for years, not without hope ; but a hope that those who knew him most intimately would say was fast dying out.

The Squire's great-coat, fur gloves and cap and Arctic shoes were all lying on the settee, and as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, a boy of apparently fifteen or sixteen years of age came bustling into the room, stamping his feet and with the usual noise and confusion of a boy of his age, full of exuberant life and overflowing with healthy spirits.

"Shut the door," said the Squire, in a voice that seemed especially low and sad in contrast to the storm that had begun and the bustle that always attended the presence of his precocious son.

"Better get out the sleigh, hadn't I, Squire?"

Jim always addressed his father as "Squire," not from any lack of respect, for "a better boy at heart never lived ; but he is devilish," as old Mother Jenkins explained to the new parson, in giving him the idiosyncrasies of his parishioners. "It has been snowing for an hour and will not stop *this* night."

"Yes, Jim, hitch up to the sleigh ; but you had better not put the colt in, for I think I will go right on up to Stephen's. He was telling me last Sunday that that new hand was no good, and he had let him go. This is going



to be a heavy snow and Stephen won't have enough help with the cattle, so I will take the boys right on up there to-night and give that friend of Jack's a fitting introduction into the Western life, with which, Jack writes, his father is so anxious to have him acquainted. Go tell mother to get me a piece ready, and you have the team out to the sleigh, for I want to start early so as to stop and get a few things to take up to Stephen. Tell mother I can't wait for supper, so just get me a little something that is handy and I will make out. But here, hold on," for this rapid boy was well out into the hall before his father had fully finished his instructions. "Now mind, don't hitch up the colt, for I want a steady team to-night; it's going to be too cold and rough to break in any of your fancy colts for you."

As the farmer finished speaking, young Jim darted out of the room, calling at the top of his voice :

"Ma, Katie, Aunt Sally, some of you, what is the matter with you all? Are you sleeping?"

Several doors opened, and several voices exclaimed :

"Jim, what is the matter? Are you hurt? Is anybody sick?"

It seemed they could never get used to the noisy boy. And then, as they all came to the head of the stairs and saw the rosy-cheeked lad with no especial terror depicted on his face, some scolded, some turned back in apparent disgust at what seemed to them a very false alarm, and with possibly a shade of shame that they could never understand Jim, and that his ringing voice should always be able to startle them.

"What is it, Jimmie?" his mother said. "Why can't you learn to be more quiet?"

"The Squire wants his piece right away; says he can't



wait for supper, and I have got to get the team out. Now hurry, Ma ; don't be so slow. He is going to go up to Steve's, so if you want to send anything along, get it ready and don't keep us waiting."

During all of which Jim's countenance expressed nothing unusual, only being lit up with its usual animation. Whenever he had the smallest commission imaginable to execute, it was always acted upon as if requiring the greatest dispatch.

Giving his mother a big hug and a kiss, he once more rushed out into the storm, and there was no doubt but that his duties in getting his father started on his journey would be promptly performed at least ; but whether the Squire's instructions would be explicitly carried out was a matter of great doubt, as this young man was very much impressed with the idea of his own judgment being superior to that of the Squire's in the details of everyday life. As for general information, science, and art, or history, and all such "foolishness" as Jim expressed it—he didn't think he knew much about such things ; but when it came to running the farm, it was a matter of surprise to the whole community how often Jim had his way and how often Jim's way turned out to be the best way.

"Now, I don't see no sense in the Squire's not wanting to drive the colt ; it has been standing in the stable for two weeks and is so full of the 'Old Nick' that it is as much as a man's life is worth to go near its heels."

Jim referred more especially to himself, in speaking of this danger from the colt's heels.

"The colt will drive just as steady as old Billy, and he was out in the storms long before I was born ; so it is time he was taking life a little easier. That's the way with the Squire : he never wants to give up any of his old



things and never wants to drive anything but Billy and Moss. I suppose he means well enough, but he doesn't give the matter thought, as I do. It's a pity about the Squire. What would he do if anything should happen to me? Well, the only thing is, I must think for him, so I will just hitch up Moss and the colt and give old Billy a rest."

Almost before Jim had thought this all out in such a satisfactory manner to himself, he had the sleigh out in the yard and by the aid of one or two of the farm-hands, the team was hitched to it.

Mike, a broad-shouldered Irishman, had the colt by its head, and Jim was kicking the snow, which had become quite deep by now, from his boots, preparatory to jumping in the sleigh and driving to the house for the Squire.

In a moment he was well seated, had the reins firmly in his hands and his commanding, though boyish, voice sang out :

"Let him go, Mike, and get out of the way."

As Mike said afterwards : "Young Jim ought to have told me to get out of the way first and then let go ;" for the moment the restless and high-spirited animal felt the tightening of the rein upon his bit, he bounded in the air, forging ahead of the more sedate Moss, although she was a spirited horse herself, and Mike was thrown head over heels along the side of the yard, almost disappearing in a small pile of snow that the wind, eddying around the barn, had drifted there.

But Jim was no mean horseman and the frantic endeavors of Ben—for so Jim had named his famous colt—to run only caused a more settled look of confidence and a smile to twinkle in his eyes, while he soothingly called out.

"Whoa, there ; be still, baby," at the same time touch-



ing Moss's slick sides with the whip that the team might take the bit together, thus enabling him to guide them safely and drive up to the door with a flourish; for Jim was very fearless and at the same time proud of his horsemanship.

"Hallo, the house there! Whoa, Ben. Hallo, Ma; tell the Squire I am ready.

"Be still, I tell you"—this to the restive colt.

"Hallo, Ma, I knew you would not have him ready. By George, this is a rough night; I would drive up to Steve's myself, if there was anybody to leave at home to attend to things, and keep the Squire in a night like this. Whoa, sir, it is blamed funny I can't teach this colt to stand still a minute; he'd be just the same if the thermometer was a hundred in the shade. Whoa, I tell you. Well, take that, will you?"—hitting the colt a sharp cut with his lash. "I'll give you some excuse for moving about, if you won't stand still."

"Here comes the Squire at last. Whoa, boy! Whoa, sir! I never did see such a fool as that blamed colt is;" and as the Squire came towards the sleigh, Jim bounded out and was at the colt's head not a minute too soon.

Assuming a very matter-of-fact expression, he accosted the Squire with:

"My sakes! but this is a hard night to be out driving; I hope you and the boys won't get lost crossing the Lambert prairies."

The blinding snow, which was falling faster as the darkness approached, and the rising wind, which drove in fitful gusts, prevented the Squire at first from noticing the team his young hopeful had provided for the long, severe drive that was before him; but a nearer approach and Ben's restlessness soon caught Squire Lykin's attention.



"Jim, I would rather you had done as I asked you," was all he said as he muffled himself in the robes ; and with confident hands, born of long experience, he took up the reins saying :

"I am ready, Jimmie ; I depend on you seeing to the stock and attending to mother's wants until I get back."

The colt, no doubt owing to Jim's soothing influence, moved off comparatively quiet, and a journey that was to have a life-long influence over the lives of more than one was begun.

"Now this breaks me all up," said Jim, as he trudged back through the snow. "The Squire is an awful funny man. As long as I have lived with him, I can't make him out somehow. If he had given me a regular set-to about putting Ben in I would have felt a good deal better ; if he would only give me a good scolding, or even a licking, when I don't do as he tells me, I think it would do me good. I wish I had hitched up old Billy, because Ben will pull on the bit every step of the way, and no man can find the road across the prairie to-night, while Billy would not go a foot out of the way if the snow was up to his belly. I don't know as much as I think I do, and I have no patience with the Squire for putting up with me as he does. Well, it's done now, and I know the Squire will get through somehow all right ; It won't be the first time he has gotten out of scrapes I have led him into ; but you can bet I am going to take to doing as he tells me, if I know he is in the wrong : he will be right in the end."

All of which, although seemingly inconsistent from Jim's way of expressing it, only proves Squire Lykin's good judgment and thorough knowledge of the best way to manage his boy.



By this time Jim had reached the barn, and was busy-ing himself with the chores of the night, the matter having passed out of his mind for the time being.

As soon as the Squire had his team straightened out in the road, he speeded them along as rapidly as the fast-falling snow would permit. It was growing much colder all the time, and although the clouds were heavy, it was hardly likely that the snow could continue in a much lower temperature.

"It is odd that it keeps snowing so fast," soliloquized Squire Lykin, "while it is so cold. I thought we were going to have a deep one this time, but it will not keep on more than an hour or so, cold as it is."

This was no pleasure drive by any means. The wind had risen to an unusual velocity and the dry snow was beginning to drift, leaving the road bare in places, while further along it was piled abreast the team; and, hardy Westerner though he was, the Squire bowed his head to the storm and sought, by bending forward and turning himself from side to side, to seek shelter as it were from the elements.

"This will be a hard night for those city chaps. It seems to me I never was in a worse storm. I almost wish I had planned differently and sent Jimmie and a couple of hands to help Steve. That Jim is a host himself, and Jack never was much good on the farm. He is big enough and strong and willing, but I guess he was made for something different from shoveling corn and loading hay; and now after his two years of luxurious indolence, I call it, it really is too hard to expect the boy to do any real work, especially in weather like this. Steady, there, Ben. My! how the snow is drifting."

"He says, though, in all his letters, that he wants to



feed out one lot of cattle before he settles down to his profession; that he is just aching for some hard, steady work—work that will get him up early in the morning and make him tired enough to sleep when night comes.

“There is something the matter with that boy: his letters for the last six months have worried me. He can’t have been doing wrong, and there is not a particle of deceit in him; still I know something is amiss with the lad. I wonder if he has fallen in love with some of those city girls and the little fools don’t know how to appreciate a man like Jack. If he had a pretty face and dandified ways it would come nearer pleasing them; but all I have got to say is, it will be a mighty fortunate little woman that wins Jack for a husband. It’s always the way with these brainy men,—they must go and fall in love with some silly girl.

“But I guess I am judging Jack too hastily; he has his profession too much at heart. It was born and bred in the bone with Jack, and can’t be turned aside lightly; funny, though, that he should want to come home and go to work on the old farm in midwinter, when he seemed to be doing so well, leading such a gay life and having so many honors heaped upon him.

“Maybe the boy is in debt; he has cost me a good farm already, but I never begrudged him anything he asked for, nor refused or delayed sending him money as soon as he wrote for it; so it can’t be that. Well, we will soon see, soon see; the boy will have a hearty welcome home and work enough, if he wants work; there is always plenty of that where there is stock about.

“Heigh-ho! here we are at the bridge. I must have driven a little fast, but the horses will get a rest before we start on the real trip for the night.”



The Squire had driven the six miles from his corner to the bridge, on the outskirts of Pleasantville, in a little more than an hour, which was very good time over such a road and in such weather, even for the blooded team behind which he was sitting.

Driving across the bridge, the Squire jogged his horses through the main street of the town until, reaching the post-office, he turned into a shed under which were several sleighs, two or three saddle-horses and a couple of men who at once took charge of the Squire's turn-out, hitched the team and, after rubbing the frozen snow from their fetlocks with some dry straw, covered the horses with the blankets and robes from the sleigh.

Meanwhile, the Squire, more benumbed with cold than he had imagined, stumbled out of his sleigh, and stamping his feet and striking his hands about his body to induce some circulation and warmth into these numb extremities, trotted into the post-office, and after getting his mail and ordering a few articles into his sleigh from an adjacent store, walked a block or two to the Pleasantville House, the principal hotel in the thriving little city, where he found a little knot of friends and acquaintances and declined to drink at the bar, explaining that he didn't believe in drinking when he had a thirty-mile drive to make, with the thermometer getting down about zero.

"You are not going up to Stephen's this night, are you, Squire?" queried a dozen voices at once.

"Yes," said the old man with a smile, breaking the now rapidly melting icicles from his beard; "that's nothing for a man, especially when he has a good team."

"Well, I am a man," said George Barrows, a big strapping fellow of some thirty years, a little flushed with drink, and coming from the piercing weather into the heated



bar-room, "and I wouldn't drive to Stephen's farm to-night behind the best team in S—— County, not for the team and farm in the bargain."

So the Squire discussed the advisability of making such a perilous drive, and none could better appreciate the danger and suffering attending it than these hardy farmers. They then passed on to the merits of the Squire's horses, his cattle and farms, the weather, past, present, and future. It was especially gratifying to hear the complimentary remarks and see the pleased looks of his associates upon learning that Jack was expected on the train that night, for Jack had always been a great favorite.

Throwing off his fur trappings, upon learning that No. 4 was late owing to the storm and might be an hour or two behind time, the Squire settled down to wait patiently, which his even disposition enabled him to do.



## CHAPTER II.

ON the 4th day of December, 18— there appeared in the society columns of one of the leading New York papers the following :

*“ Mr. and Mrs. Gilbar last night gave a large dinner at their palatial home on Fifth Avenue, the occasion being the bidding adieu for a time to society of their son, Mr. Don Gilbar, and his friend, young Dr. Lykin, who start West to-night for Dr. Lykin’s old home in Central Iowa. It goes without saying that the affair was a great success, both gastronomically and intellectually, there being a constant flow of wine, wit, and repartee. The guests were permitted to look over what is one of the finest houses in the city, which was beautifully decorated with rare exotic plants and flowers. Mrs. Gilbar looked exceptionally handsome in cream silk and lace ; Miss Gilbar naïve and fetching in peach silk ; Mrs. Penn-Decker in white silk and point lace ; Mrs. F. Eustice in black and gold lace ; Mrs. Stevens in blue crepe ; Miss Warmesley in an imported gown of white and gold. Music was discoursed throughout the evening by G——’s Orchestra, one of the finest in the city, and many tripped the light fantastic toe and indulged in the mazy waltz in the large and magnificent ball-room. It was evident to all that young Don and his friend, Dr. Lykin, were the favorites with the gentler sex ; and it is due these young men to say that they impartially lowered their lances, as Knights of the Terpsichorean Art. Among the other guests were——”*

And then followed a list of the many that were present during the evening, the article closing with :

*Dr. Lykin has made a remarkable record for so young a man, and we predict for him a bright future.”*

On the morning upon which this article appeared, Don



Gilbar and Jack Lykin, after a light breakfast of a chop, egg and toast, were comfortably ensconced in a couple of leather easy-chairs, with feet cocked upon the mantel, habilitated in negligée shirts, smoking jackets, slippers, Scotch plaid and narrow black stripe on light gray trousers, respectively. While they would hardly be recognized as the gallants so faultlessly attired the evening before, still the society man of the day was undoubtedly stamped upon their countenances and careless, graceful pose.

Don had the deserved reputation of being one of the handsomest men in a city noted for its handsome men; a little above the average height and weight, dark hair and eyes, a ravishing mustache, close-cropped full beard, hair cut in the latest fashion, and an Apollo in form and symmetry; every motion portraying grace and at the same time indomitable strength. His father being immensely rich, young Gilbar had possessed unlimited advantages, which he had improved, possessing himself of more than an average college education in an intellectual sense and what is not a minor adjunct to a college course, an athletic training in every department and in all its branches. He had never done anything that was of the least practical use in the world, unless enjoying one's self to the fullest extent of one's tastes and desires could be called of practical use.

Don was fond of good living, had tasted of every form of dissipation and excitement in our large cities, barring the society of ladies. He was passionately fond of his sister Maud, but aside from her and his mother, whom he regarded with dutiful respect, he often remarked that personally he would be as well satisfied if there wasn't a woman in the world. True, his surroundings from his



youth up to the present time—and Don would be twenty-four in a few months—had thrown him constantly in society, and few knew so well how to act in the ball-room, theatre, or on the promenade ; but all this was a bore to him ; his happiness was in the rooms of the KILLSCHUYL Club.

He had not an equal among his associates at sparring, fencing, running or jumping, and had been stroke oar of his college crew. At all such sports Don excelled. His room denoted his tastes. The furniture was all expensive and not uncomfortable, at the same time it could not be called luxurious. On the walls were tastefully displayed foils, the latest improved rifles, especially adapted for target and clay pigeon shooting, also fishing-rods and a beautifully mounted shot-gun ; nor was there a lack of boxing gloves that had seen more or less wear, together with cricket bats, tennis racquets, and in fact everything that would be found in the apartments of an athlete, who was at the same time a sportsman and had abundant money at his command to supply his every wish.

His companion, young Dr. Lykin, was an entirely different specimen ; somewhat larger than Don, powerfully built, and quite at ease in his movements, but far from being good-looking. Possessed of what seemed to be an over-abundance of red hair, fair, thin skin, decidedly freckled, rather large mouth, a faint yellow mustache, which Jack intended and no doubt thought would cover his large, slightly protruding upper teeth ; but if this was the mission of Jack's mustache, it failed signally. Yet for all that, having been thrown in varied walks in life, as boy and man, he was always one of the most popular. This was undoubtedly due to his being possessed of a generous heart and a brilliant intellect.

He had early developed a strong inclination to surgery.



His youngest brother, James, had prophesied some time ago that Jack would make a good butcher and that he would make his fortune if he would go to Chicago and secure a job sticking pigs.

But Jack aspired to something higher than this, and after receiving a thorough education in the best colleges in the East, he had been gaining experience in the hospitals in New York City.

A few weeks before the morning on which we find them each apparently following some train of thought, Dr. Lykin had successfully performed a new and difficult operation in surgery, which older and more experienced hands had deemed impossible, making his name at once and forever famous throughout America and Continental Europe.

The meeting of these two young men had been accidental, and, as is so often the case under such circumstances, they had grown to be inseparable. It was one night at the Club; Don had become involved in a quarrel over a game of cards and his opponents, far outnumbering him, were on the point of doing him great and serious bodily injury, when Jack, appearing on the scene—although all were entire strangers to him—took the part of weak in numbers against the strong, and without asking any questions as to who was in the right or wrong, aided Don in coming out victorious and unharmed; and from that night Jack and Don were fast friends.

As a matter of course, Don spent much of his time in Dr. Lykin's apartments, and in turn invited Jack to his own home. At first the young doctor declined and evaded his friend's pressing invitations, claiming that his whole heart and mind were on his profession, that he had no time or inclination for social duties and pleasures. But



at last—as he had really grown very fond of Don—perceiving that he was seriously straining their strong ties of affection by his constant refusals, he yielded one evening to young Gilbar's especially earnest solicitations and accompanied him home.

On this, Dr. Lykin's fateful evening, the two young men had hardly been seated in the brilliantly lighted drawing-room of No. — Fifth Avenue, the magnificent residence of Mr. Gilbar, when a light footfall came tripping along the hall and a melodious contralto voice was heard singing—

“I am so glad, Oh! I am so glad,  
For he is coming to-night, coming to-night.”

and a neat little figure, dressed to perfection in a soft clinging dress of gray, her jet black hair coiled high on her head, her black eyes snapping, appeared between the portières, her red lips parted, showing her pearly white teeth, as she broke out in a hearty “Ha! ha! ha!” She ran towards Don and jumped on his lap with:

“Good evening, dearie.” Catching him by both ears, she kissed him again and again, on both cheeks, eyes, mouth and forehead; and then before the broad-chested young man could regain his breath, she had glided demurely up to Jack, and extending a dainty hand which Jack made out to barely touch with his big freckled fingers, said: “How do you do, Dr. Lykin? Don is so very slow, he never seems to think it necessary to introduce me to anyone.”

It appeared to Jack that anyone would have to be very quick to introduce this young lady, although he did not say anything; in fact he couldn't. Not naturally bashful, and never at fault, being of an honest, serious disposition, he never hesitated in saying and acting what he thought;



but now his big heart was in his throat, rendering him for the moment speechless. But fortunately it wasn't necessary or in fact possible for him to get a word in just yet, as Miss Gilbar rushed right ahead with—

“Don thinks I am a child yet. I really do not believe he remembers I made my *début* several months ago ; and truly I am almost nineteen, although you might not think it. Do you know, you look just about like I expected you would. We have had Dr. Lykin for breakfast, Jack for lunch and both of them for dinner. For the last six weeks Don has talked of no one else, and I don't believe he ever gives me a thought any more. My ! but he thinks you are great. But you are not looking well,” for Jack had really grown pale from conflicting emotions. “Pardon me, please be seated,” offering an irresistible temptation by seating herself on the sofa and drawing her skirts just the least little bit closer.

The young doctor for the first time in his life really awkwardly sat down and, finding his voice, told a deliberate lie by saying :

“I have not been well for some time”—he had never felt an ache or pain in his life—“but I am not expecting to work so hard as I have been doing and I will soon be picking up.”

“Please don't do that, Doctor. Stick to your work ; there may not be so much money in it, but I am sure you will get arrested if you go to ‘picking up’ things, and then I wouldn't like you, even if you were freed on the plea of your being a kleptomaniac.”

Jack laughed heartily and thought, “I deserved this for the awkward way in which I expressed myself,” and then entering into the spirit of the conversation, he said :

“I had not thought about picking up things until now,



upon perceiving what bright shining articles are lying loose in portions of the city.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Gilbar a little stiffly.

"However," continued the doctor, "the temptation must have come to me much the same as to the man who is seeing a diamond for the first time, and a remarkably brilliant one at that"—this with an admiring look at his companion that could not be mistaken.

"Well, now, the last part of that is not so bad," replied the little damsel, but when it comes to comparing me to an article and insinuating I am loose, I think you are very rude ; of course you were smart enough to fix it up before you stopped. Well, Don said you were smart, and so of course you are."

While this sprightly repartee was being carried on, Don had drawn his chair nearer the light, and had been looking over the evening paper. Apparently finding nothing of interest, he broke in upon the conversation with :

"My goodness, Maud, are we ever going to have dinner? Do you think I invited Dr. Lykin home with me just to listen to your foolishness and senseless prattle? The man is positively starving, and his emaciated looks should show you this."

"Of course you brought him home for me to see, and to amuse me ; and you are not a bit hungry, are you, Doctor?" queried Maud, jumping up.

"Oh no, indeed ; you are a rarer treat than the most tempting and daintiest of viands," said the young doctor.

"Now then, Mr. Gilbar, you see there is some one who appreciates me."

At this they all laughed, and just then Mrs. Gilbar came into the room, followed in a few moments by Don's father, who extended a hearty welcome to the young doctor, hav-



ing met him before at his office ; and as Jack was introduced to Mrs. Gilbar, dinner was announced.

The Gilbars lived very luxuriously, and Jack was soon enjoying a sumptuous repast with his friend's family, the enjoyment not a little enhanced by the sprightly wit of Don's irrepressible sister.

Jack had not been prepared to meet a young lady on accompanying Don to his home, as while young Gilbar had casually mentioned having a sister, the impression was made on Jack that this sister was yet a little girl. He had not heard of her victorious entry into society a few months previous, as he did not know Don at the time it occurred, and up to now had been literally without knowledge of the doings of society in general.

Mr. Gilbar, Sr., had grown immensely rich, being one of the most bold and successful financiers of the age. He was a man of small proportions, physically ; but his narrow shoulders supported a head of such unusual size as to make the man appear to be almost deformed.

At middle age, already very rich, he had become infatuated with an actress, who after a short but persistent courtship married him and (although it was a matter of surprise to many) Nellie W—— had made Mr. Gilbar an exceptionally good wife. Some said there was very little affection between them, but that is a matter not to be discussed.

An extremely handsome woman, she presided over her household with rare grace, and performed her duties when called upon, as hostess, brilliantly and in a manner above criticism. There could be no doubt that Mr. Gilbar was very proud of his wife and that his wife regarded her husband with the greatest esteem and respect.

Their union had been blest with the two children, Don



and Maud. The latter it was hard for them to think of except as "the baby"; two children of whom, taking everything into consideration, they had every reason to be proud.

Coming into such a family, as the most intimate friend of the son and heir, Jack's bark was launched under the most favorable circumstances upon the treacherous bosom of the sea of social excitement, and christened "Excelsior." This, added to his phenomenal success as a surgeon, coupled with a natural magnetism, made him one of the most sought after and honored young men of the day.

For a time his life was one long Summer day, without a cloud to mar the horizon of his ambition. But there came a change; clouds appeared—not little fleecy vapors, but big dark storm-clouds, obscuring the sun of his happiness and chilling the atmosphere of his life to the temperature of an Arctic Winter.

On the first evening—and for some little time after—Jack met Miss Gilbar, he could not have told what he thought of her; his feelings and emotions were numbed. Then in a few weeks love came; not as it comes to the many, but to the few; a love for her possessed him body and soul, both waking and sleeping; there was no life only in her:—

"Thou art my life, my soul, my heart,  
The very eyes of me—  
Thou hast command of every part,  
To live and die for thee."

Dr. Lykin's relations with Maud were so free from restraint and conventionalities of any kind that it would seem to have been a very easy matter for him to tell her



of his deep love ; but it was for this very reason that a fitting opportunity never presented itself.

His leisure moments were spent almost entirely with her ; she seemed to almost prefer his society to that of anyone else,—at least there was no doubt that she enjoyed his ready wit and sharp retorts, being at times more than a match for her. But to bring an earnest thought or a serious subject into the conversation when talking to Maud Gilbar was simply impossible.

Nor was Jack impatient. She was kind to him and he was happy, his mind constantly occupied with his profession and his great love ; so that he did not even seek to make an opportunity, when he might know (what he was taking to a great extent as a matter of course) that his love, at least in a measure, was returned.

But the time came when he was to meet with his first discouragement, and it happened in this way.

He had made an engagement to escort Miss Gilbar to the opera, but on calling for her, found she was a little indisposed ; and upon an invitation to spend the evening with her at home, especially as Don was out for an hour and she felt so lonesome, he dispossessed himself of coat and hat and sat down by her side with nothing of disappointment depicted in his countenance at the change in the programme.

“ I’ll not dismiss the carriage, as I will only stay a little while. This is pure fickleness on your part ; you were just wild to hear Norma ; and frightened almost to death, fearing I would take Miss Warmesley instead of you. I don’t believe you are one bit sick ; you just do these things to make your slave miserable with this forced imprisonment.”

And then pausing for the expected retort, Jack was



surprised and moved by receiving nothing but a faint, pitiful smile.

Never having seen her in such a mood, nor half so winning, his immeasurable love rushed uncontrolled from heart to lip, and with these words he wooed her :

“Maud, darling, are you suffering so? If I could only bear for you your every pain and leave you nothing but happiness and joy! I have loved you always; you are everything in the world to me,—more than life, ambition, and all the honors that my brightest hopes have anticipated. Can you love me? Will you be my wife and make my happiness more than mortal?”

Her very stillness made him bold and his speaking easy. He would have said more, much more, had she not interrupted him with the heartiest—

“Ha! ha! ha! Jack, you always were funny; but this is one of the best things you ever got off; indeed it is real good of you to make me forget I am sick, and you did look so comical and in earnest. I didn’t want to stop you, but it was so funny. Ha! ha! ha!”

“Miss Gilbar,” said the young doctor, drawing himself up to his full height, “the love of any honest man is not a matter of derision and is entitled at least to respect.”

“Now hold on, Jack,” said Maud, standing almost on tiptoe and placing her dainty little hand upon his shoulder; “please don’t scold me; you never did that before. If you don’t like me, do not come where I am; but I won’t be scolded;” and then, softening and letting him feel her precious little weight, she added: “Now really, do not be so foolish; we have been such good company for each other; don’t be angry, and promise you will never be silly again.”



"Please be seated, Miss Gilbar," said Jack, gently guiding her to a chair." I cannot go without telling you I am not angry with you now; but my disappointment is greater than I can bear. My ambition, every fond hope in life, is gone; do not fear that I will ever talk to you again as I have to-night; but I shall love you for ever. I know myself too well to hope that it can ever be otherwise; some day you will look at life in a more serious light, but God grant that day may be far distant. You are far happier now. I think that, with everyone, earnestness brings with it more of sorrow than of joy. Good-bye, darling," and touching her brow, unresisted, fervently with his lips, he was gone without another word.

"Well, if he isn't the biggest fool, dear noble old Jack!" And then Maud, womanlike, gave vent to her emotions in a flood of tears. And here Don found her, an hour later, curled up in her chair, fast asleep, with tear stains still upon her cheeks.

"Why, what's the matter, my dear little sister? Are you sick, or have you and Jack had a quarrel?" knowing Jack was expecting to go to the opera with Maud that evening and it was not yet time for them to have returned.

"Oh! don't ask so many questions, dearie. Yes, I am sick; and yes, Jack was here," and, laughing a little, "that's all." Kissing him, she said "good-night," and Don, like a good brother, did not then, or afterward, annoy her with further questioning, and, bidding her an affectionate good-night, they parted.

From this night, Dr. Lykin was changed; he slighted his work, although making a manful effort to continue as he had always done before. But his unfaltering nerve



and steady eye were gone; everything grew distasteful to him; he was missed from the club; declined all invitations, without even making an excuse or offering a regret, and before long began pining for a change. And then it was he thought of returning to his old home on the farm; with the hope that by severe toil and exposure he might regain his lost appetite and once more enjoy the luxury of sound, healthy sleep. He was more than ever in Don's company, but seldom called at the Gilbar mansion; and when he did, it was only to make a conventional call and pay his respects to Mr. and Mrs. Gilbar, as he felt was his duty towards people who had uniformly treated him with such extremely cordial hospitality. He there as a matter of course saw Maud, but she had grown so shy and treated him with such cold, distant courtesy, that he felt that he had offended her beyond forgiveness and must carry his love without hope to the grave. How little did he know a woman's heart!

On the very night that Jack had tried to plead his cause so earnestly at the shrine of his divinity, Miss Gilbar found that she had a heart, and within the hour also found that she had parted with it: it was Jack's, all Jack's; and burying her burning cheeks in the snowy pillows, with shame at her levity over a matter that was now of just as much importance to her as it could possibly be, she had cried herself to sleep. But for the life of her she could not have told whether it was for joy or fear; great joy at knowing Jack loved her, or fear that she had driven him away for ever. And it was the knowledge of her own love that made her shy.

So this was the state of affairs when Jack one day made the bald, emphatic statement to Don that he was going home.



"Do you know," said Don, "I have been expecting this, old man ; and as I have learned to love you as a brother, believe me I sincerely regret what I am almost sure is the cause of the great change in you. But are you not a little hasty ? You, who are so noted for your bravery and determined spirit, should not be easily discouraged."

"Don't, Don," said Jack, "don't talk to me about it. You know what has broken my life and I thank you for not putting it into plain words ; but do not urge me to stay ; I must, I will, leave this hateful city. Would to God I had never left the farm."

So Don desisted from further argument.

As he had long wished to make a trip through the West, he then and there proposed to Jack that he should accompany him home.

"Will you go with me ?" cried Jack, seizing both of his hands ; "could you content yourself on those lonesome plains, even for a day, after the gay life you have always led ? or do you say you will go just to please me ? Your affection shames me, and I will try to take up a new life, if only for your sake."

And then Don explained that he thought the world of Jack, and didn't care one bit for the city ; that, anyhow, the dream of his life was to see the great West.

So it was decided that Don would go home with Jack, a decision that more than pleased Don's father, who feared Don was growing too fond of poker and rather too wild in the city, with nothing to occupy his mind.

Only after he had exhausted every plea he could think of, did Jack consent to be present at the reception, given mainly in his honor ; but now it was over and being the



last Don and Jack would see of city gayeties for a time, all their thoughts were turned westward.

“Well, Jack, what time did you say we started this evening?”

“At 5.10, on the limited express for Chicago,” replied Jack; “I have secured our tickets and apartments; so you have nothing to do but send your trunk to the depot. Get your lazy self there in some way and jump aboard. This fellow spreads it on pretty thick in his account of last night, doesn’t he?”

“I didn’t see it. What did he say?”

“Oh, nothing much, but that you and I were the shining lights. Bah! How disgusting it all is. Did you notice how that old Mrs. W—— worked her cards to get me to dance with her (as she thinks) lovely daughter? Well, I gave in gracefully. Dolly was as good as any to dance with; she doesn’t waltz badly that’s one thing. You got me into that affair and of course I fully appreciate the kindness of your mother and father in so highly honoring me; but I went through the whole performance like a stick; I really did not know what I was doing half the time. Ah! Good-morning, Miss Maud,” jumping up; “how do you do after last night’s dissipation? Seems to me that old Major Collins must be very charming in some people’s eyes, when you take into consideration how continually they danced together.”

“When were you appointed my guardian, Mr. Jack?” retorted Maud. “I must talk to somebody, and also waltz, and as no one else took pity on me I feel very thankful to the Major.”

All this was somewhat exaggerated. Maud had received a great deal of attention from all the young men; but feeling very sad at the thought that this would be the



last night, for some time, she would be with her brother and the man who was dearer to her than all else on earth, the sober old Major was more in accord with her drooping spirits than the younger men who were there; but what hurt her most was that Jack had not asked her for even one dance. She had hoped much from this last night, and had dreamed of the opportunity she felt sure would then be presented to tell Jack that now she loved him all his heart could wish. But Jack, sensitive to a fault where his love was in question, did not dare brook a second refusal; nor could he trust himself to feel Maud's warm heart beating against his breast, and keep within him words of love that were in spite of all so constantly in his mind. So these two were but little together, although both had but one thought, and that for each other.

"Well, little girl," said Don, "we boys will not be a trouble to you much longer, for a time at least."

"I never said you were a trouble, dearie," retorted Maud, going over to Don and throwing her plump little arms about his neck. "I wish you were not going on this trip; you are both foolish,"—this with a sly glance at Jack—"to leave right in the height of the season. Somehow, I feel something will happen to you way out there, and you know I should never get over it if anything should happen to"—she hesitated a moment—"either of you."

Maud was very demure this morning and was really feeling unwarrantably sad, as Don had often been from home for a longer period than he was expecting to stay this time; but it wasn't Don altogether; it was the thought: Am I losing Jack forever? How could she express to him, without a sacrifice of maidenly modesty,



that his suit would not be met with mirth would he only press it again.

But time was fast fleeting away, and in the bustle and confusion of getting "the boys" off, there was little opportunity for more than a formal bidding adieu. And after a busy day (as no matter whether the journey be short or long there is always so much to do at the last moment), Jack and Don had said good-bye and, ten minutes past five, were seated in the luxurious parlor-car on the Chicago Limited Express, and with the turning of the wheels of the powerful engine, they bade good-bye to New York.

They said little for a time, both being deeply wrapt in thought, and both wrong in their conjecture as to which would first again see the great city. Their trip was uneventful; the first part of the journey being in pleasant weather; and although it began growing much colder as the long train sped across the prairies of Illinois, they could not feel the change, seated in the comfortable car, and hardly noticed it until the snow began to fall and they ran into the great storm.

The difficulty in seeing signals and the necessity of slackening speed as a precaution in the driving snow, caused them to be about an hour late in reaching their destination; but at six o'clock, engine No. 102 appeared to the anxious little group of hardy farmers who were braving the fierce storm and anxiously awaiting its arrival.

Like a huge monster, its headlight glaring through the gloom of the fast approaching darkness, it came to a stop, panting and puffing, as if exhausted from its battle with the elements.



## CHAPTER III.

"HOLLO, Jack!" shouted old Squire Lykins, "you picked out a fine day to come home; but we are glad to see you. So this is your friend. What's his name?"

"This is Mr. Don Gilbar," responded Jack. "My father, Don."

The old farmer grasped Don firmly by the hand, and the powerful grip with which Don returned the salutation raised him at once in the old Squire's estimation.

"You are just as welcome as you can be," said the Squire to Don. "It is pretty rough out here, and I don't know how you will stand it after your delicate city ways; but we will do our best to furnish you some good sport."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Lykin, I am very pleased to meet you; and if you are Jack's sort, you and I will get along I am sure. As to my standing it out here, if I don't prove the equal of the hardiest man on your farms, in strength and endurance, you can put me down for a duffer."

The Squire having been on the frontier so long, wasn't right sure what a duffer looked like; but as he was growing more pleased with Jack's friend every minute, he mentally decided that he wouldn't put Don down for anything that wasn't "just about right."

After cordially greeting the delegation who had braved the storm and crossed the road to meet them, the young men, with their friends, repaired to the inn and after



partaking of a substantial repast, discussed the advisability of driving thirty miles across the country in an open sleigh to Jack's brother Stephen's.

Stephen was Squire Lykin's oldest son, to whom upon his marriage day, some years before, the Squire had given a large prairie farm, about thirty-six or thirty-seven miles from the home farm. Here Stephen chiefly raised corn during the Summer season and in the Fall and Winter months fattened large droves of cattle and hogs, which were owned in partnership with his father.

Jack had spent most of his days, before going East, on this prairie farm and it was his intention now to return there and invest some of his money along with his brother Stephen ; all of which had been arranged by letter before Jack left the East.

The snow continued to fall heavily and although the wind blew bitterly cold, the temperature had not fallen since dark and there was every prospect that the storm would continue all night and until the next day at least. The villagers and near-by farmers, who had congregated at the hostelry, in every way endeavored to dissuade them from starting before the next morning, urging that they could not find the road in such a driving storm, or even finding the track, it would be so blocked with the drifted snow that their progress must necessarily be very slow.

However, opposition seemed to make these men all the more determined. Don was more than anxious to make the trip, as it would be a new experience for him, his healthy blood bounding through his veins as he thought of battling with the biting gale. It seemed to him he would be repaid for coming West this one night, in the grand experience that was in prospect. He didn't come



West to sit by the fire; he had always gloried in hearing and reading of just such nights on the frontier as this, and of the men who braved the storms and came through them unharmed. As yet Don had never met his match, and felt in his heart disposed to laugh at the snow and cold.

As for Jack, he didn't care so much; he more fully appreciated what was before them than did Don, having suffered from Iowa snows when a boy. But he really didn't care; his spirits, which had been so drooping for a time, were beginning to rise with the occasion, and so far as he gave it a thought a little bodily pain would be a positive relief from the constant agony gnawing at his heart.

While comfortably seated in the parlor car on their trip of about half-way across the continent, he had nothing to do but think. Starting out with a ray of hope, because Miss Gilbar had asked him to write to her, his thoughts had given him less and less of comfort as the hours slowly passed and were dragging him into deeper despair, until upon nearing home they had been turned into another channel, and for a time he was forgetting the immediate past, thinking of his early days with the gratification always attending the returning home of a dutiful son.

Squire Lykin argued that he knew every foot of the way, that the snow was yet light upon the ground and would not be drifted in the timber, through which the most of their route—some twenty miles—lay. He had as good a team as ever jingled bells; somebody had to break the road, why not he? Those who opposed him were growing to be a lot of old women; every one of them had been out much colder nights; he could stand



the drive and so could the boys; he didn't believe in raising children to be afraid of hoar frost.

So it was decided that they should start at once. The team was ordered up to the door, and muffled in their furs, the three hardy men stepped into the sleigh and in less time than it takes to tell it had left the cheerful lights of first the inn and then the thriving city, carrying with them the good wishes and expressions of their less brave associates that the old Squire and his companions were made of the right stuff.

They crossed the bridge over the creek, and turning sharply to the right, drove on and out into the black night, lighted only by the fast falling, fleecy snow. Jack had been away from home some seven years, leaving when he was about nineteen, and there had been so many changes in this thriving Western section that in the uncertain light the surroundings appeared not less familiar to him than to Don. But the Squire had been making trips all over the country, in all kinds of weather, the past thirty years, so that he was a safe pilot.

It was too cold and the storm and the wind too penetrating for a very connected conversation, so that after a few further inquiries after mother, the health of the family in particular and the community in general, some complimentary remarks on the team and the Squire's turnout, talk ceased entirely and each settled down in the robes, devoting their energies, the Squire to the driving, and the young men to keeping warm. Thus they passed the scattering farm houses, which grew less and less as the distance increased between them and the town.

And so the first six miles succumbed to the powerful strides of their blooded team in a little more than an hour, for the roads so far had been fairly good, there having



been enough travel during the day to keep them partially open. And then Jack said :

“ I am getting cold, especially my feet. What do you say, Don, to taking a little run ; and then I will get in and drive, if father wants to take a turn at putting his blood in circulation.”

This proposition meeting with Don's approval, they tumbled out of the sleigh and, throwing their shoulders well back, trotted behind in true Indian style.

After a run of a mile, they were beginning to think of regaining their seats, when something entirely unforeseen and unexpected happened.

The Squire had been congratulating himself on his horse-flesh, thinking : “ What a mighty steady colt ! Old Billy couldn't have traveled truer than he does, and I believe he is fresher than when I left home,” for Ben had been making long, steady strides without a stumble or a faulty step, since they left the town, neither swerving to the right or left, true as the compass needle ; forging ahead, his hard flat feet scorning the miles as they left them behind. So the Squire had loosened his pull on the bit, as the horses settled down to their even, never-tiring gait ; but he was soon to know that his confidence was placed in a false security.

Driving into a small clearing in the forest, without a moment's warning, a terrible crash and deafening noise burst above the roaring of the storm.

Two woodmen, in felling a rugged oak the previous day, had misjudged their curf, and instead of falling to the ground, the huge mass had been caught by its wide-spreading branches and hung suspended in the air until the great weight of snow tore it from its lodgment, and it fell to the ground with a crash unheard of, as it was un-



expected. The horses sprang into the air with a snort of terror, and, beyond control, they flew away at the top of their speed.

Instinctively, both men in the road sprang toward the sleigh. Jack, being nearest, secured his hold and tumbled in; but Don, a moment too late, measured his length in the road, striking his head on a corner of the projecting runner as he fell, stunned for the moment.

He regained the full consciousness of his senses to find himself alone in the midst of the great woods, a situation rendered more perilous by the bitter cold, and presently his ideas again became confused as the warm blood from the slight wound in his head dropped, dropped, dropped on the pure white snow, to be lost forever in the flakes following fast upon each other. He could hardly think, but stumbled forward, feeling somehow that it would be death to remain inactive.

Wrapping the reins around his arms, the old Squire pulled and tugged with all his strength, powerless to check the speed of the affrighted steeds. On they plunged through the darkness of the night and the blinding snow. The Squire's soothing and again commanding voice was unheeded, if indeed it could be distinguished above the howling winds.

Thoroughly frightened as they were, a stump, or, swerving from side to side in their mad career, anon striking the trees along the side, causing an avalanche of snow and dead branches to beat upon their swaying backs and heads, only added to their terror, until, from sheer exhaustion, their killing pace slackened, grew less and less, and, unable to put forth a further effort, they stood still; heaving, panting, trembling in every nerve, unable to make further progress whatever danger threatened them.



“My God, where is Don, father?” cried Jack, the moment he could collect his thoughts. Everything had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly, the constant danger of being dashed to pieces in their mad flight and battling with the running team had for the time driven all else from their minds save the thought of self-preservation, which springs instinctively into every human breast in times of great danger.

“Isn’t he here? Didn’t you both gain the sleigh?” anxiously asked the farmer. “I had all I could do with these mad horses. Great God! what will he ever do, a stranger in the forest and on such a night? Where are we, Jack, anyhow? I don’t feel right somehow. I am falling. Oh! save——”

The severe strain, the excitement, the bitter cold, almost congealing the blood in his veins, proved too much for the old Squire, hardened and schooled though he was to a life of exposure. Grasping at nothing, he fell insensible from the sleigh before Jack could catch him.

The horses scarcely moved at this additional confusion, while Jack, instantly bounding to his father’s side, with almost superhuman strength dragged, pushed and lifted the heavy, inert weight again into the sleigh, and, scarcely knowing what he did, covered the poor man with the robes; he took up the reins and urged the wearied horses into motion, they having had time to regain partial vitality.

What should he do? Whither should he drive? He could form no idea as to the distance to the nearest habitation, nor in what direction it lay. Was he retracing their steps, or was he moving forward? All was the merest conjecture with him. Still he must do something; to remain inactive was courting death for himself and his father, if indeed his father were not already dead.



And so, without any especial aim or purpose, he forced the unwilling horses on a few miles, when the barking of some dogs gladdened his ears; and almost at the same moment he drove into a clearing, where stood a substantial dwelling, although without sign of any inward life. But the howling of the dogs and Jack's stentorian voice—his faculties once more alert as prospects of assistance appeared at hand—soon brought a head through an open window and a voice called back through the storm:

"Who in the devil is there? You have got a bad night for traveling, stranger; but wait a minute until I get something on and we will try to find more comfortable quarters than I should say you have out there."

"Well, hurry; don't be all night letting me in," shouted back Jack; "I have a man with me almost dead."

The Squire was beginning to move about in the bottom of the sleigh, to Jack's intense delight.

"Is that so?" replied the voice; "I will be right out to you," and closing the window with a slam, a man of short stature almost instantly appeared through an opening door and came floundering through the snow toward the travelers, pulling on his blouse and settling his crude fur cap more firmly about his ears as he came. "Well, who are you?" asked the man. "You are welcome a night like this, even if you are escaping from the sheriff, but old Zack Gibbons always wants to know who he is talking to; one can talk better, somehow, if he knows a man's name. Now, I have told you who I am, what might I call you?"

"Jack Lykin, and this is my father, Squire Hugh Lykin," replied Jack, as Zack Gibbons reached the side of the sleigh. "Now, don't waste time talking. Help me to get father into the house, for this night, taking it



all in all, has well-nigh cost the poor old man his life. Come, bear a hand here."

"Old Squire Lykin, did you say?" queried Zack. "Well, I thought it would be many a long year before I would see the Squire give in to a little snow and frosty weather like this, although I acknowledge it's a pretty bad night. Help you in with him? 'Course I will; there isn't a man in all Iowa more welcome to the Hotel de Gibbons," as Zack facetiously dubbed his forest inn, "than old Squire Lykin. So you are Jack, are you? The Squire was telling me, the last time he was through here, that you would be home soon, but I must say I wasn't looking for you to-night."

During the flow of conversation by mine host, the little party had made their way across the short distance to the house, the Squire having revived sufficiently to move forward with the assistance of the two men.

The slumbering fire in the big open fireplace had been rudely awakened by the weight of fresh logs thrown upon it and, as if in wrath at this rough disturbance, it roared and crackled, its bright flame rushing up the massive chimney, casting a fierce light at the frost-covered windows.

Chafing the Squire's wrists and temples with snow and ice, and pouring a plentiful supply of brandy down his throat, soon revived him in a measure, aided by the cheerful glow of the fire and the genial atmosphere of the room.

In the meanwhile, the exhausted horses had been sheltered in the comfortable stalls of the Gibbons's commodious barn and knee deep in the bright dry straw, had after nibbling a bite or two of hay and cooling their burning throats with a bucket of the purest water, almost immediately lain down.



Then it was that Jack, as yet hardly feeling the tax upon his energies in his great anxiety over the whereabouts of his dearest friend, feeling that all he could do had been done for his father, and that all that was now required was a few hours' rest to restore Squire Lykin to his wonted activity, accosted the genial landlord with :

"How many horses have you, Mr. Gibbons, and how many men are there in the house and in the neighborhood? for we have got to scour every foot of the woods between here and Pleasantville. Rouse them now; get them all out; I want to start at once."

"Now don't, 'Mr.' me, in the first place," said Zack; "you can get much more out of me by calling me just 'Zack,' because then I think you are my friend; and in the next place, what's the matter with you? You're not getting wild are you, over the little bit of brandy you took, and coming in the hot room? Go back to Pleasantville to-night and expect me and all the fellows to follow you! You are crazy, man; but you needn't think I'm no fool."

This last caused Jack to smile in spite of his troubled heart.

"Why didn't you stay there, if this isn't good enough for you? Get out," continued the irate host, thoroughly angered that anyone should want to leave his hospitable walls and talk, as he hastily judged, with drunken imbecility.

But Jack tersely explained the thrilling experience of the night, and how his boon companion, a stranger to such a life, in the midst of the thick timber was struggling alone with the howling storm, if God in his mercy had given him strength enough to keep the breath in his body.



At first, old Zack contended that it was useless to attempt to find anyone, dead or alive, that night; wait until morning. If the man was alive, it was because he had found shelter; if he was dead, he wouldn't mind staying out a few hours longer. But finally, after offering large monetary rewards, Jack and the Squire induced a score of men, a part of whom were connected with the house and stable and the remainder being made up of those storm-bound, and who for other reasons were stopping at the Gibbons House, to engage in a search for the unfortunate young man so perilously exposed to the pitiless storm.

The majority of the searching party were almost as familiar with the paths in the surrounding woods as with Zack Gibbons's cheerful hearthstone; but the deep snow had so obliterated all natural signs that to-night a stranger was but little more at fault than one bred and reared in the forest. So they arranged a code of signals to be used in preventing them from being lost, one from the other, as they scattered, preparatory to making a thorough search. All were protected from the storm, as their several tastes and inclinations dictated. Some took meat and others drink, as an aid, should their spirits flag in a protracted seeking for the missing man.

All night long they beat the woods, at intervals building fires to warm their freezing bodies and, by gaining short rests, be able to continue their fruitless hunt; at times shouting at the top of their voices, or firing off a gun, in the vain hope that they might elicit some faint response to their endeavors to make their presence known to young Gilbar, if he were still alive.

They hunted in pairs, they hunted singly, and again they all collected in a group for consultation and instruc-



tions how they should proceed further. Jack's ken of the forests of his boyhood days came back to him instinctively; he was the acknowledged leader as a matter of course. After hours of vain search, blazing the trees at intervals, as they proceeded, to prevent danger of being lost in the woods, now trackless from the falling snow, they came to the clearing from where the horses started to run. This they could tell by the tree which had been the source of their anguish and despair.

The steadily falling snow was much deeper than when Jack left the spot a few hours before, entirely obliterating any tracks and destroying any appearance of a road. From here they redoubled their efforts, and Jack's hopes arose, knowing Don's stalwart build and iron nerve, thinking that he had from this point retraced his footsteps toward the town. This was a wise thought, as very naturally Don would feel sure of being lost should he attempt to follow the direction taken by the runaway team; whereas the road back to the city would be fresh in his mind; and to an athlete like young Gilbar a tramp of six or seven miles through the snow, and in such a storm, while it would not be play, would be far from an impossibility.

Jack wondered why he had not thought of this before and remained quietly at the Gibbons House. So sure did he now feel that his friend was safe in the village, or in some sheltering farmhouse along the road, that he dismissed his men, telling each one to go his way, and promising a munificent remuneration to all who had served him so faithfully and well; upon which they separated, some to return to Zack Gibbons's and some to continue on to the town.

Jack pressed as rapidly as possible towards the inn in



Pleasantville, inquiring at every house he came to if any stranger had knocked at their gates, asking for shelter during the night, only to be met with sometimes a pleasant, sometimes a surly, negative reply, until a while after daylight, when he reached the Pleasantville House without tidings of young Don. Nor had he returned to the village.

The snow, without abatement, continued falling until the afternoon of the second day, when it ceased, followed by intense cold, the temperature falling many degrees below zero. Large and small parties were formed to search for the missing man and everything that experience and theory could suggest was done, but to no avail, and Jack was forced to the conclusion at last, which older heads than his had come to, that poor Don had perished in the storm; nor were there any hopes of finding his body until the snows disappeared in the spring.

Squire Lykin very soon recovered from his indisposition, attendant upon the excitement of the ever-to-be-remembered night for its sad ending and aided very materially, both by his counsel and personal efforts in the search. He did this principally to please Jack, as his better judgment told him from the first that there was but little chance of ever finding Don Gilbar alive.

After the search had been given over, the Squire and Jack made the journey to Stephen's farm in safety, where Jack was heartily welcomed by his brother and all the family. They found the loss of stock during the storm had been less than in former years, during such disastrous times. This was due undoubtedly to their being better prepared every year for the severe Winter weather.

Being thoroughly convinced that Don was numbered with the dead, Jack apprised young Gilbar's family of the fact,



recounting the minutest details connected with the events of the terrible storm.

Don's loss was mourned bitterly, and for a time they refused to be comforted. A desultory correspondence was carried on during the winter, between Jack and the family; he was at all times sending them strong words of sympathy and expressions of cheerfulness, notwithstanding his own heart was heavy, until gradually the acute pain was allayed, and they took up the thread of life, resuming their old duties in a natural way and with hope that in time the bitter sorrow might pass away.

Jack worked hard and faithfully at Stephen's, making visits at intervals of a few days to the home farm. The country maidens vied with each other to win a smile from his stern, set lips, but all to no purpose. He studied a great deal, and wrote some valuable articles on surgery. His mind in a great measure resumed its activity, but his heart was dull and heavy; pretty girls, with bright ribbons and snowy pinafores, had no charms for the prematurely old man.

The winter proved to be one of unusual severity while it lasted, there being continuous snows and much bitter cold weather; and then spring weather came all at once. Rains and warm sunshine melted the snow in a marvelous manner; there were freshets, loss of stock and property along the streams, but by May—so strangely are we constituted—the inhabitants of S—— County had forgotten that there ever was a Winter, busying themselves in planting the crops, beneath the rays of the warm Spring sun and the dome of the deep blue sky.

A most extended patrolling of the forest for miles in all directions had failed to elicit any signs of Don Gilbar, dead or alive.



Early in May, at the most earnest solicitations of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbar, Jack returned to New York City, they saying it would be a great comfort to them to have him, who had been so dear to their son, with them for so long as he would be contented to remain.



## CHAPTER IV.

MAUD had been in a flutter of excitement ever since Jack had promised definitely to come and had named the day on which they might expect him. She loved Jack madly; often she censured herself for thinking so continually of him. The loss of poor Don, after the first sting had passed away, could not make her feel as sad as she thought she ought to feel. Jack was now everything to her, and what if he had ceased to care for her? Perish the thought—he must love her; she would make him. He could not but know that she was nervous at the time—it now seemed so long ago—that he had asked her to be his wife, with so much of truthful earnestness shining out of his blue eyes.

What a contrast there was between big, strong, honest Jack and all the fools that she had been forced to depend on for society. They were all the time calling her a “dream,” a “poem”; she was “divine,” until she was sick and tired of it.

And now Jack was really coming. “Glory! Glory! Glory!” sang the little maiden, clapping her hands in glee at the thought, forgetting all the past in the intoxicating delight of the present.

One lovely Spring afternoon, when the sun was making a manful effort to brighten the smoke-covered city and succeeding in making a soft, dreamy light, Jack ran up the steps of the Gilbar residence, rang the bell, while a flood of thoughts rushed over him,—thoughts of his lost friend,



and thoughts of his Queen of Hearts, whom he would see again.

The old footman welcomed him respectfully, and, "Yes, Mrs. and Miss Gilbar are at home," he said, and made bold to take the responsibility of adding, "they will be pleased to come down the instant Dr. Lykin's card is presented."

Mrs. Gilbar came first. Jack was shocked at the great change in her; the handsome woman had aged ten years in appearance. She grieved constantly for Don; always so proud of her handsome son, his loss was irreparable to her. She gave Jack a hearty welcome, although forcing the tears back and by a supreme will retaining command of herself. Jack's presence causing her great loss to present itself so vividly to her mind, came near losing her control. After being seated, they chatted a moment, when, hearing a slight scream, Jack immediately rose to his feet as Maud, not a particle different from when he first saw her, it seemed to Jack, came running into the room.

Good old George, the footman, had not been able to find his little mistress at first, as Jack was not expected until later in the day. The household had all been engaged in their several pursuits when he arrived, hence the little scream of delight Jack heard when Maud was found and apprised of his arrival.

Without the slightest warning or hesitancy at her mother's presence, she rushed right at Jack, and, throwing her dimpled arms about his neck, kissed him fair and square; then, realizing what she had done, she impulsively pushed him from her; her snowy neck and face to the tips of her dainty ears turned scarlet with confusion as Jack, too, for the instant oblivious of the fact that they were not alone, was clasping her to his heart, with :



"My darling, do you——"

But Maud, recovering herself rapidly, quickly checked him.

"Yes, I do a great many foolish things, and I don't wonder you hate me."

"But, Maud——" started Jack.

"Well, let's not argue right here before mamma; it's very rude."

At all this Mrs. Gilbar only faintly smiled; she had never tried to correct or restrain Maud in her wild, spontaneous ways. She was kind and indulgent to a fault toward her, but everything approaching government was missing; and as Mr. Gilbar was so wrapped up in his immense financial enterprises, Maud had grown up as she willed.

Conversation very soon dragged. There were only two thoughts in the minds of these three people: love and Don, and as they seemed to hesitate about entering upon these two topics, the situation grew sadly embarrassing.

Maud made abortive efforts to be humorous, but failed so ignominiously that Jack pitied her, and aware that Maud was keenly cognizant of her being wanting in wit, on this occasion did not insult her by even feigning laughter.

Finally Mrs. Gilbar brought from the depths of her not overly imaginative mind the sage suggestion that Dr. Lykin must be weary from so long a journey as he had made, ignoring the fact that he had devoted as much time as possible a few moments before in explaining the present great ease and comfort in traveling; and that after resting about all day, as he had, he felt none the worse for his trip. But like a drowning man he jumped at Mrs. Gilbar's kindly straw of an excuse for getting to himself and alone with



his thoughts; and upon his solemn promise that he would "make himself at home," he was shown to the apartments prepared for him.

Dropping into a big easy-chair, he stared blankly out of the window, oblivious of the passing crowd, while he thought of his darling. Would she ever love him? Should he lay a regular siege to her heart? There was no importance to be attached to that thoughtless kiss, he argued; she gave him that because her memory and great love for Don overcame her, and how nearly he had lost all control of himself as he was on the point of asking her if she at last loved him.

And so he communed with his soul, which like a buoy now floated on the top of a big white capped wave of hope, as the bright sun broke through the parting clouds, reflecting a sheen like silver with its dazzling splendor, then as suddenly disappearing, sank almost out of sight, as the ruthless wave sped on, to be followed by another, and another. To his mind's eye he was progressing, as a buoy to the natural eye seems to move forward, but, as a matter of fact, when they warned him of the approach of the dinner hour, he was no nearer the goal of his life's struggle than he had been months before.

In truth, when Maud knew Jack had come, she forgot mother, father, Don, all, save that there stood Jack, until the material effects of coming in contact with his lips of flesh and blood sent an electric shock through her veins, that brought her to a consciousness of how she might be laying bare the inmost recesses of her heart.

The dinner hour and the evening passed away rapidly. Mr. Gilbar remained at home—an unusual thing for him—and Jack told them over again all about Don and the fearful storm, his modulating voice causing the hush of



death to pervade the spacious room, so intent was his little audience of assembled listeners. Mr. Gilbar explained that he should have gone West himself, but he knew all had been done that could be done, and in his heart he felt that, having sent on money lavishly, he had fulfilled his duty as a father.

After this evening, Jack spent a very pleasant week looking up his old acquaintances, all of whom urged him to resume his professional work. Maud was uniformly sweet and winning. They had many a tilt of words, as of old, both entering into the spirit and humor of their ready wit, but Jack was impatient. He had interests in the West that would soon be calling him home. His nature was aggressive and it fretted him to be masking his affections. There was no use trying; he could not be in Maud's company longer and not once more tell her he loved her. Being alone with her one morning, leaning over her chair, watching her fairy hands essaying to do some "drawn work," he abruptly changed some unimportant conversation with:

"Maud, I must be going home in a few days, and—well I am loving you harder than ever. I must offer you some amusement by telling you that my love grows stronger as the moments go by. If I should live forever, and the power of my tongue be multiplied as the sands of the sea, it would be paralyzed long before I could tell you half of my love. Now, darling, won't you try in some way to love me? Speak to me. Say something."

Poor little Maud was so happy she could hardly speak, for although she had felt sure it would all come out soon, after all, Jack had been sudden at last and for the moment had taken her unawares. But not for long was the young lady abashed; her lovely head sinking just a little, she turned and said rapidly:



“Well, Jack, you must be blind that you could not see how much I love you, and I think you have been real mean to wait almost two weeks before giving me a chance to say so. I loved you always, only I didn’t know it until you set me thinking that night you went away so huffy, just because I laughed a little. But,” throwing her head back into his arms, “I would rather be dead, if you wouldn’t love me, dear old Jack.”

And then, after dividing the honors of kissing each other with Jack, she began teasing him unmercifully; but he took it all in good part. They were both so happy that it mattered little what either said or did. She coaxed him to remain in New York, but he must return soon to the West. However, he promised to close out his interests there as quickly as possible, and return to his calling with renewed interest and vigor, vowing to some day make of himself the great man Maud thought him.

Mr. and Mrs. Gilbar gave a most willing consent to the engagement of their daughter to Dr. Lykin, as they were very fond of Jack, in their way, and there was no doubt but that he had a great future before him and would be an honorable acquisition to the family.

One day Jack had consented, in a moment of rashness, to escort Maud on a shopping expedition. He was in a frame of mind when Maud extorted this promise from him to consent to almost anything. It had been a great load on his mind ever since the fatal day upon which Maud had taken advantage of his weakness. However, when the day selected for the excursion came, the fates proved good to poor Jack for, much to his secret delight, the rain came down in fitful sheets.

About the time they expected starting, Jack sauntered into the room, where he found Maud beating a tattoo on



the window-pane, the sombre clouds reflecting their gloom upon her disappointed countenance.

"Well, Maud," questioned Jack with not an uncheerful voice, do you think you can weather the storm, from here to ———s?" placing his arm lightly about her waist, as he drew near her at the window.

"I can storm at the weather," retorted Maud, spitefully. "You are just as hateful as you can be to-day," she continued; "you are positively glad that it is raining, just so I can't go out; I do not believe you love me one bit. Why, I never saw you look so happy, and all because you see I am so disappointed."

"Of course I got up this rain on purpose," replied Jack. "You know I have full control and charge of the weather and I go about the world seeking little girls who wish to go out on certain days, and then I rain on them on that day; and if I am unfortunate enough to be in their company, I don't look miserable, as I should, but I seem to be positively happy."

"What does make you so exasperating, Jack?" interrupted Maud. "When you know that I have all that I can bear, you stand here poking fun at me."

"You are indeed a very much-abused young lady," continued Jack, not weakening one bit, "with the great burden placed upon your young and tender shoulders this miserable day by me, great ogre that I evidently am, from your standpoint."

"There is nothing very pointed about my standing," this from Maud, as she smiled a little up at Jack; and the bright sunshine in Jack's laughing eyes, catching the colors of this little smile, made a short rainbow of promise that the storm inside at least, if it might so be called, would soon be over.



"The whole cause," went on Jack, "of your discomfiture is that I do nothing but afflict you with my presence and, what is even worse, am so discourteous as to agree with you. There is not a particle of justice, in fact it is a downright shame, that as there are only three hundred and sixty-five days in this year, one of them must be a rainy day."

"Have you not a bit of pity, dear?" asked Maud, leaning her supple little weight on his strong arm. "I do not think I am so foolish and inconsistent as you would make me out; only I am disappointed and provoked that it had to rain this day, of all other days."

Just then a carriage stopped before the house, and a lady, while not so old yet of uncertain age, alighted and tripped playfully up the few steps from the curb to the door, in a manner that was very amusing to those who knew her as an aspirant to the dignity of an administrator of justice, for she was, or at least claimed to be, reading law, and the world stood ready at any moment to be apprised of the fact that she had been admitted to the Bar.

"Well, if there isn't Miss Warmsey!" exclaimed Maud, "coming here to-day in all this rain; but as she is tough and weather-beaten, the rain will not hurt her much. Jack, that woman is dead in love with you. Only a short time ago she thought me too insignificant for her notice, and flecked me from her brilliant intellect as she would a mote of dust; but since I have found favor in Dr. Lykin's eyes and am deemed worthy of a thought from the fathomless depths of his discerning brain, I am much sought after by the great LL.B, LL.D, L.C.J. that is to be. She offers you her heart, which is a kind of Legal Tender."

At all this Jack smiled audibly and replied that he



would hardly consider the vivacious Miss Warmsley's heart as value received, even should she offer it in exchange for his; and then upon the entrance of old George, with the lady's card, Jack excused Maud, remarking that it was fortunate Miss Warmsley called at a time of the day when he would not be expected to be about; and should she have seen him at the window and offer any of her plausible excuses for the necessity of seeing him "for just a minute," Maud was to say that he was indisposed.

"I can't tell an untruth," returned Maud, "and you know you are not a bit sick to-day; besides, 'this case of Arthur White's, whose big toe was crushed under his grandmother's rocker, is so interesting,' " anticipating what the embryo limb of the law would say.

"It is no falsehood," said Jack, "that I am asking you to tell; I do not claim to be unwell, but you may be very sure that I am not disposed to waste anytime with the talented young lady waiting below. So take her this kiss, with my compliments, and come back to me as quickly as the exigency of the occasion will permit."

Maud took the kiss but immediately returned it, saying she would not take his kisses to anyone, as she reluctantly left him for much less congenial company.

These happy hours for Jack and his inamorata were interspersed with those of hard work, as Jack was very busy arranging his affairs so that he might return West, preparatory to closing out all his interests there, when he expected to come back and enter upon the large practice that was waiting for his acceptance. Nothing very definite had been decided upon as to when Jack and Maud would be married, but it was tacitly understood that the wedding would take place some time the following Autumn.



The middle of June found Jack again on the platform of the pretty little station at Pleasantville. He had bade Maud an affectionate adieu, promising to come back to her very soon and after that never to leave her for "a second."

This extraordinary pledge was of Maud's framing and extorted from Jack in the vain hope that it would keep the tears out of her black eyes and thus make the parting at least a little easier for them both. Jack had previously written home of his engagement, with a full and highly colored description of his fiancée, so that Jim, who met him at the depot, accosted him with :

"How are you, Jack, I'm mighty glad to see you, old man. How's your girl?"

"She was very well," replied Jack, "when I left ; sent her love to you all and you especially, Jimmie. I have told her so much about you and she seems quite anxious to see you. I am sure you will love her very dearly as she is peculiarly your style ; besides, every one is fond of her who knows her."

"Oh ! well, say, Jack, don't get started on your rhapsodies ; I'd take with a big grain of allowance everything you would tell me. At the same time, I do not disapprove of the match nor mean to oppose it in any way. You have my consent and best wishes, only it is lucky for you that she didn't meet me first." Jim said all this with a very important air and a twinkle of humor in his eye, and then added, "But come on, let's hurry and get in the buggy so as to get home some time. I have got all of my chores to do yet to-night."



## CHAPTER V.

JIM took much pleasure in putting his spanking team through their best paces, for Jack's benefit, having a three-year-old colt hitched by the side of the famous Ben; and as both were good steppers, they reached the old farm almost before they knew it.

After a hearty supper, Jack talked for a time with his father on business matters; entertained the family in general with incidents that had happened during his sojourn in the city, and then, by the side of the good old mother, he talked until bedtime on a theme of which he could never tire, his deep, impressive voice sinking lower in its earnestness, as he told of his great love for the little witch who had won his heart; trying to anticipate any eccentricities of which Maud might be possessed and which his mother might not understand, when the time came for her to know the sprightly young lady, unless forewarned.

"You love her, my dear boy," said his mother, "so I know I shall understand and love her too."

They all retired early, as was their custom, and Jack, being tired from his journey, fell asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. A little after daybreak, he was awakened from a most refreshing slumber, and after a hasty toilet he came down to breakfast, to find the remainder of the family about finished.

"These city chaps want to sleep all day," began Jim, "why I have been——"



"Oh, I know all about it," interrupted Jack good-naturedly, "you have been up for hours, Jimmie, and have done a day's work while your lazy brother was snoozing in bed; but please be good-hearted enough to spare me, and while I sit and hide my face in shame and mother's cup of smoking coffee, get my horse ready, so I can start for the prairies as soon as I swallow a few mouthfuls."

"Your horse will be ready before you are," returned Jim. "I saddled her before breakfast, knowing you would be in a stew and would want to make up for time lost in slumber, so there is nothing to do but to put the bits in her mouth; in fact, there is Mike leading her up to the door now."

Jack's "mouthfuls" proved to be a hearty breakfast, such as the generous appetite of a healthy young man demanded, superinduced by the fresh country air and the tempting viands set before him; but he finished after a time and, lighting a cigar, mounted his horse, a beautiful bay mare, which Jack had broken to the saddle himself, for his own especial use.

His course lay first into the town of Pleasantville. Jack enjoyed to the fullest every breath of air he drew into his lungs, laden with the sweet perfume of the fruit trees, breaking into full bloom, and the tiny flowers along the roadside, freshened and sparkling under the morning dew.

The little city was all astir by the time Jack reached it, and he having some matters to attend to there, at once set to work; but although using as much expedition as was practicable, the sun was well up in the heavens by the time he again started on his way towards his brother Stephen's farm. The day was lovely and, although the



sun was beginning to have considerable force, the first miles of his journey were through the woods, where the friendly boughs sheltered him from its rays, and then, too, his thoughts were so wholly occupied that he took little count of the day being warm or cold. And thus pressing forward, keeping his horse on a steady fox trot, he almost rode down a man who was trudging along the road before him, and who, hearing the near approach of Jack's horse's hoofs, turned and accosted him with:—

“Good-morning, sir; you are rather a careless rider, or possibly think a pedestrian has no rights that his more fortunate fellows on horseback are bound to respect.” And then he began to interrogate, “Can you tell me if I am on the right road to——” by now, having come close to Jack's stirrup, and looking him full in the face: “My God, Jack, is this you?” at the same time attempting to grasp his hand at which Jack touched his horse lightly with his heel, and sheered off.

Jack had had an extensive experience, both on the frontier and in the large cities, and this experience had taught him not to be taken unawares. This tramp might wish to rob him at least of his horse, and, as he had started out with the intention of riding, he did not propose to change his plans and walk, giving the other fellow the benefit of his mount.

It was a very seedy looking individual who had stopped him; long, straggling hair, unkempt beard, nondescript clothes; the coat, though much worn and threadbare, of the finest texture; his lower limbs incased in leather breeches, decorated in the most marvelous manner with brilliant dyes, beads, and delicate lacing, although these, too, showed signs of hard wear. The shirt—if such it could be called—seemed more an undermantle of scarlet



cloth, apparently barren of sleeves. Moccasins were on his feet; his head surmounted by a coonskin cap, to which the defunct coon's head, with its sharp nose, glassy eyes and little ears, was still appended, as was its tail, which hung far down the man's back.

"This man has seen better days," was Jack's first thought, and then—"Have I ever known him? Something tells me that I have; there is something familiar about this object, but I can't place him with certainty. He seems to know me, but may have heard my name in the town last night or this morning. These fellows forget that calling a man by his name and claiming old acquaintanceship is no new game; still I will find out what he wants and give him some good advice, if nothing more."

So, taking a steady hold on his bridle rein and seating himself firmly in the saddle, as he thought that one cannot tell about these desperate fellows and it would be best to be prepared for any sudden emergency, he said:

"Well, my good man, this is certainly myself; but if you wish a favor, your familiarity does not augur well for its being granted. Why do you not go to work? You seem strong, and work is plenty. Then, too, I doubt if you would find it as laborious as tramping over the country. Come, now, what do you say, shall I find you steady employment?"

There was much surprise depicted in the man's countenance when Jack first drew away from him, which gave way in a moment to a look of intelligence, as though some swift-passing thought had given an explanation to the tramp's brain. As Jack delivered his wholesome advice, a close observer could have discerned a merry twinkle in the Bohemian's eyes, and as Jack paused. the



man, standing in his slouching attitude and with a rough voice, answered :

“ I want none of your chaff about work. What do you know about work, riding around on your fine horses, while we poor devils walk? You are just as able to work as I am, and I have a mind to pull you off in the road and take a ride myself.”

“ You are an insolent vagrant,” replied Jack, “ and my time is too valuable to waste with such as you ; so get out of my way or I will ride over you.” And suiting the action to the word, he spoke to his restless horse, who responded to the word with a bound.

But quick as a flash, having anticipated Jack’s movements, the tramp sprang for the horse’s head and laid hold of the bridle rein with a grasp not to be shaken off lightly ; and as Jack raised his fist to strike, a tussle ensued, which resulted in the rider being dragged to the ground.

As he rolled in the dust, the tramp placed his foot lightly upon the vanquished man’s chest, commanding him in a serio-comic voice as he held his coonskin cap high in the air, to repeat :—

“ Ransom or no ransom, I yield to Don Gilbar.”

He then gently raised his recent antagonist who was for the moment speechless, as a flood of memories rushed through his brain, making him dumb with amazement and unspeakable surprise.

The voice, the expression, when associated with the pronouncing of Don Gilbar’s name, left no doubt in Jack’s mind as to who it was standing beside him ; but it seemed he could not collect his thoughts. This seedy looking individual was so entirely different from the polished gentleman he had mourned so sorrowfully as



being dead ; and yet the man who had given such powerful proofs of his strength a moment before was too material to be a ghost,—besides it was not the hour for ghosts, being nearer midday than midnight.

It came to Jack in a confused way how he had lost his old friend Don, but to associate that Don with the one before him was very difficult. However, his ideas became clearer as Don grasped his hand and with his old familiar tone, asked :

“Where are we, old man, anyhow ? Is there such a place as New York City ? Is this the great West ? I must confess so far everything has been much different from what I expected. I suppose you find me very much changed, but mirrors have not been plentiful in the hotel where I have been stopping, so I hardly know what I do look like. Yes, I can readily see how you did not know me and mistook me for a tramp. Ha ! ha ! ha ! That was pretty good, your advising me to go to work ; and your thinking toil and I must be strangers yet proved you to be a true judge of a man’s character. I had started out to look for you, but did not even hope to find you so soon. Come, Jack, tell me all that has been going on. I suppose you all thought me dead. Is everybody well ? Get a start, Jack, and tell me something ; you have been standing here like a fool, long enough. Do you yet doubt who I am, or are we so soon forgotten ? Come, come, man ; speak up.”

“Well, God bless me,” said Jack at last, “can this be Don in the flesh ; Don, dear old Don, whom I never expected to see in this world again ? Have I forgotten you ? No indeed ; not a day has passed over my head since we parted that I have not thought of you ; and it is really Don !” seizing both his hands.



"I'll not ask you where you have been. It must be a long story, and now that I have you, I can wait to hear your tale. Mount your steed, Sir Champion: 'To the victor belong the spoils;' and we will hie ourselves to some wayside inn and partake of something to strengthen the inner man, for I confess to feeling quite weak from the drubbing I received at your hands."

"Now, Jack, that isn't kind," replied Don. "You know I was forced to use prompt and vigorous measures, else you would have escaped me. The last time, if my memory does not play me false, you left me rather uncere- moniously, putting your blooded horses to their utmost speed; and I have such a great regard for you that I this time determined to keep you, if I had to do it by main force."

"Well, a truce to banter," laughed Jack, "let us be off. It is only a few miles to Zack Gibbons's hotel, where we can obtain what we need in the way of something to eat and to drink, another horse and some clothes which will enable you to present a somewhat more civilized appearance than, I must suggest, you do in your present artistic costume. So come, jump on the horse, and let us be off."

"Your counsel is always best," replied Don, "so we won't argue; and as we will make no better time by only one of us riding, suppose we both walk."

"So be it," agreed Jack, and going a few yards to the side of the road where his well trained mare had stood patiently waiting while they had been talking, and throwing the bridle rein over his arm, led her as they walked toward the inn in the midst of the forest.

Their earnest conversation made the distance unnoticeable; and as they entered the clearing in which the inn stood, the hour it had taken to walk it seemed but a few



minutes. Their appearance was the signal for a drawing closer together of the few loungers who are always to be found, more or less, about country inns. Of course Jack was known to most of them, and they were used to seeing all manner of rough characters, arrayed in any description of habiliment that taste might dictate or circumstances make necessary. So there was no great surprise evinced, as the two travelers stopped before the house; only the natural interest and satisfaction attendant upon any incident that might break the monotony of their usual uneventful existence.

"How are you boys?" accosted Jack. "Good-morning, friend Gibbons. Come, get a move on you. Let us have some of that famous apple-jack you are always boasting about, and then get us up as good a meal as you know how, for we are hungry as wolves." He tossed his bridle rein to an overgrown youth, telling the boy to "take good care of Dolly."

Then drawing old Zack to one side, he explained to him that he wanted a good horse for his companion to ride and a suit of clothes for him that would at least make him more comfortable than fur caps and leather breeches in the heat that was increasing to that of summer, as the sun rose to the meridian, and at the same time would look a little more genteel, if not quite so picturesque.

Upon the accommodating landlord's assurance that Jack could have anything he wanted, his requests, so far, being very easy to comply with, he turned to the little group standing about, which had been enlarged by the arrival of quite a number, as the dinner hour approached.

"Men," said Jack, "some of you engaged with me in a hard, perilous task some months ago, and I believe all of



you have heard of the man that was lost in our great snow-storm last winter. We have all mourned him as dead and brought forward our wisdom and experience as frontiersmen for additional proofs that no man, unaccustomed to our rough life, could live exposed to such a storm. But he does live and stands before you now, in the enjoyment of health and the full exercise of his mind and reason, but not in appearance the polished gentleman I once knew and described so often to you; but the same true heart beats in his breast and he wishes to thank those of you who so faithfully endured hardships in the long quest that was made for him. My best friend, boys, Don Gilbar. He is made of the right stuff. Give him a welcome among us for my sake, until you know him better, when you will be proud to call him one of us for his own sake."

These men were much too stolid to show surprise at Jack's statement. They crowded closer and plied young Gilbar with questions as to how he had escaped the rigors of that awful night, and where he had secluded himself all the time that had intervened.

"Who is your tailor?"

"What will you take for the coon?" the wits inquired.

But this all came as a matter of respectful interest in a friend of one so popular as the young doctor. But Don was very reticent in regard to his immediate past. He replied in a joking tone to all they said, claimed he was too hungry to talk and escaped at the earliest possible moment to make the change in his dress and partake of the wholesome food set out by the host for their entertainment; after which he and Jack at once started on their journey to Stephen's farm.

Mounted on two hardy roadsters they jogged along, as Jack demanded:



“Now, old man, start in and tell me all about it. Where in the world have you been? How did you ever live through that awful night? Who sheltered you, and why have we sought you in vain? I have restrained my impatience and given you all the news since your disappearance. You know that all those you love are well. So far as my modesty would permit, you have been informed of my prospects and great joy at winning Maud. You look a little like your old self, in those Sunday clothes of old Zack’s and shorn of your Samsonian locks. Ha! ha! ha! you did look tough when I met you this morning. Gad, I am sore yet from that tussle; but come, you talk now; I am all ears.”

Don smiled, as he replied, “Jack, I haven’t one word to tell you now. My adventure has been so strange, so weird, that should I tell you what is in my mind, you would not believe it upon my testimony unsupported by other proofs. Now I am with you and my past life returns to me with vivid realization. It seems I must have been dreaming. Should I say now where I have been, I would swear it was not on earth—it was nearer heaven, only there can be no devils in heaven, and I have seen devils.

“But hold! I must think,” cried Don, as his voice grew more and more excited. “Don’t ask me anything, Jack; you shall know all some day. I have struggled for days and months—I know not how long—to escape; and yet soon—to-morrow, next week, whenever I have finished certain preparations—I must, if I can, return whence I came. Talk of something else, my more than friend,” he concluded, as he rode close to Jack and touched his hand lightly.

The young doctor gazed at Don in utter amazement,



He was physician enough to see how his friend's mind was affected and quickly decided not to excite Don further just then, so deftly turning the conversation into other channels, they rode rapidly on, and by the time they reached their destination, young Gilbar was in his happiest frame of mind.



## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Don realized on that stormy Winter night, that he had been left behind in the then trackless forest, his first thoughts were that the old Squire and Jack would soon succeed in gaining control of the runaway team and would of course return for him. Guided by the sound the swift-running horses made crashing through the undergrowth, he attempted to follow on, in the direction taken by the frightened steeds; this, with the view of gaining a little time, as well as keeping his blood in circulation.

Soon, however, all other noises were swallowed up by the howling storm, and as any imprint that may have been made by the horses and sleigh was almost instantly obliterated by the fast falling snow, he was soon groping his way in an aimless fashion. His hardy constitution and sinewy limbs enabled him to press forward more rapidly and for a much longer time than would have been possible for a less favored man.

After a time, the growth of timber became thicker about him, and his progress was even more difficult. He was being chilled to the bone, in spite of his exertions; then for a time he suffered terribly with the cold, after which a drowsy feeling began to steal over his senses; he hardly knew that it was storming; the howling wind appeared to be far away; his eyes and frosted cheeks were impervious to the snow that beat upon them.



Dimly sighting a short distance ahead some overhanging rocks along the stream, which had frozen, he stumbled forward in a dreamy way. His mind, enfeebled by the bitter cold which had frozen him almost stiff, imagined the rocks to be his home in the city, so far away, but still remained active enough to make him feel that if he could gain this shelter, he would ask for nothing but to reach his soft pillow and enjoy the sweet slumber that was swiftly overtaking him.

Thus he urged his faltering steps a few paces further on, but before he could compass the full distance he sank insensible in the snow.

As young Gilbar approached the overhanging rocks, he was being closely watched by two men, concealed in the shadow. He would hardly have taken notice of them, in the condition he was in, if they had stood directly in his path; but this they could not know, although they judged him as being bereft of his full senses, when they first observed his coming.

They were men whom crime had made suspicious, and as they were retreating from the fierce storm to their secret haunts, they were intending to conceal themselves from sight until Don should pass; but as he fell senseless in the snow, they came instantly to him.

"What have we here?" said the older and more villainous-looking of the two. "Damme, if he ain't a slick one, to be perambulating about the timber alone; not much of a night for a walk, either; eh, Davie?"

"Well, you size him up about right as to style," replied the man addressed as Davie, noticing Don's rich clothing and handsome fur outer garment.

"What will we do with him?" asked the man who had spoken first. "Shall we strip him? he is frozen now about



as stiff as you generally get them, so he don't need his trappings as bad as we do."

"Oh, say, pard, I wouldn't hardly do that; the man's not dead yet; I say we give him a good rubbing and take him to the cave. He's got rich friends, you can bet; and it won't be many days before they will be offering a pile for the young buck, and you'll see he'll be worth a heap more to us alive than the few skins he's got on will bring. Come, get to work here with me and let's get him away for safe-keeping; this will lead to the best find we've made yet."

"That isn't such a bad idea, Davie," replied his companion. "You've got a great head on you. With your thinking and my backing, we ought to make a big stake, some day, and this may be the opening to our way to fortune. So come ahead, we'll get the cove under cover and if there is any life left in him, we'll make it show up."

With this they raised Don roughly to their shoulders and bore him around and a few yards beyond the rocks; then pausing, they dropped him in the snow, as they would a bundle of skins.

"Don't seem to be anybody at home, does there, pard?" said Davie, as he peered into a dense thicket composed of brush, young saplings and thick undergrowth, all of which had accumulated and grown about some old stumps and fallen trees.

"Guess there's nobody at home when we are out," replied the other fellow, with a guttural laugh.

Then they began parting the brush, and upon reaching the heart of the little thicket, they, by their united efforts, turned aside a huge stump, disclosing a hole of sufficient size to admit the passage of a large body and which seemed to run obliquely into the bowels of the earth.



Then moving quickly, they brought Don to the mouth of the aperture, and while the stronger of the two men dragged him down through the opening, the other remained a moment behind until he could replace the stump which fitted closely to the ground.

Knowing that the snow would fall for some hours, at least, and completely obliterate any tracks or signs they might leave that would lead to their hiding-place being discovered, they omitted their usual precaution when entering the cave. They crawled through a narrow passage, of some little length, drawing and pushing Don's heavy body with them, until they entered a vault, or cave, of some considerable extent and size.

"Well, pard, here we are; do you start up the fire and I will set to work bringing the young laddie to. He seems to be showing signs of life already," for the rough handling they had given Don brought some color into his face, and after rubbing him vigorously with ice-cold water and pouring a little brandy down his throat, the poor fellow opened his eyes and, staring vacantly about him, began mumbling unintelligible words.

Bill Skinner, the fellow addressed as pard by Davie, having started a bright, blazing fire, which roared and crackled as it awakened the echoes, its thin curling smoke ascending and disappearing in the cracks and crevices high above their heads, joined his companion and lent his aid to restoring their find.

But their united efforts were only crowned with success in so far that Don recovered from his stupor only to be seized by a violent fever. His powerful frame, tortured by intense pains, was almost more than the two men could manage in its violent struggles, until, exhausted by his terrible ravings, he sank into a troubled sleep.



David Wilkinson and Bill Skinner had led checkered lives, being conversant with every description of crime, in its most revolting details. Both had begun their schooling in sin as members of a band of "Guerrillas," where they learned to hold their own lives, as well as the lives of others, cheaply.

The close of the war found them in Virginia, where they continued for a time to gain a livelihood by petty thieving, until, having been engaged in an extensive bank robbery, they were seized by the clutches of the law; but, escaping before their term had expired, they had finally drifted West, where they were, while as yet unknown, regarded as suspicious characters.

Bill, much the older of the two, had discovered the cave where we now find them by accident, while crossing the plains when quite a lad. Upon his return to this section, deciding to remain awhile, he had adopted it as a hiding-place and a shelter. Guarding the secret carefully, he was perfectly right in his conjecture that their haunt was known only to his partner in crime and himself.

It was especially adapted to their wants, being some distance from any usual line of travel and having two entrances, both of which it would be practically impossible to find unassisted. Here was abundant room to store their ill-gotten gains; and should murder be necessary, or even more convenient to them in gaining their point, they could very easily secrete the body of their victim, with little or no fear of discovery.

They had been planning for several days some new and desperate scheme, when the great storm caused them to wait for a short time.

They had stores and provisions safely laid away in the cave for emergency, which they began to draw upon as



they remained quietly in seclusion, until the snow would cease, giving untiring attention to their prisoner, exercising their crude knowledge of physic in their endeavors to effect his recovery.

On the third day after the snow had ceased, knowing that their captive could not escape, even were he possessed of all his faculties—which was far from being the case—they placed a small portion of food near him, together with drink, and sallied forth before daylight; leaving the cave in an entirely different direction and by a much larger opening, further down and directly upon the bank of the little creek; and made as rapidly as possible for the town of Pleasantville.

The rough traveling through the deep snow was too tedious to permit of their returning the same day, so they remained in the town over night and there learned, to their great delight, of the large reward that was offered for Don Gilbar's discovery, chuckling to themselves as the searching parties returned discouraged from their vain hunt.

They were so bold as to seek out young Doctor Lykin and obtain from him a minute description of the missing man, with the renewed promise of a munificent reward to be given to anyone who would bring back to him his poor friend, dead or alive.

The two ruffians swore they were familiar with every foot of ground in S—— County and that they would find the missing party, if he was in the State.

After hanging about the town the most of the forenoon, they started on their return to the cave, talking of and maturing their plans as they went. It would not do, these plotters thought, to produce Don too soon; they must make some show of having hunted for him and concoct



some tale as to where they found him and some plausible excuse for his condition.

Not having used any especial expedition on their return, it had grown almost dark by the time they reached the vicinity of the mouth of the cave from which they had made their exit the morning of the preceding day, and upon their nearing the spot they were much chagrined to find a party of half-breed Indians and gypsy trappers encamped on the banks of the little stream, in a sheltered nook, directly above the entrance they had been expecting to use.

They did not fear that their haunt would be discovered, as they had carefully covered their tracks when leaving the morning before, and the wind had effectually aided them by blowing and drifting the snow about, leaving not an unusual appearance anywhere along the banks of the little stream. And as the immediate entrance to the cave lay between two flat ledges of rock and was of several rods in width, hardly anyone would judge the aperture to be more than some fifteen or twenty feet in depth, and there was little danger of it being thought that there was anything in the nature of a cave in that locality ; besides, there were dozens of places in the rocks along the stream that were almost fac-similes of the spot they sought.

But the presence of these strangers made it necessary for them to undertake a wide detour, so that they might gain an entrance unobserved, it now being simply out of the question for them to attempt such a thing at the point they first intended.

So, without attracting any attention from the campers who were busy preparing for the night, they slunk away and began their weary tramp in moody silence, saving an occasional curse at their hard luck.



They had made probably half of the distance when Bill Skinner, who was ahead, stopped suddenly, with :

"Damn it, Davie, what the h—l is that?" as some dark object brushed past him with a snarl.

"It's wolves, or I am a liar," exclaimed his companion, coming up close to Skinner.

"Good God, we are in a tight place; just look at 'em, old man; the brush is full of them!" and indeed such was the case.

It was a very unusual thing, of later years, for wolves to attack travelers in this locality; still, in rare instances, where deep snows had deprived them for several days of sustenance, they had been rendered desperate enough, from hunger, to seize upon a human being for their prey.

As it was quite dark, the two men had taken no notice of the approaching danger until one of the pack, bolder than his fellows, had dashed across Skinner's track; but now it seemed, almost in an instant, a seething mass of moving objects surrounded them, the circle growing perceptibly less each moment as the frightened men stood with blanched cheeks.

An occasional growl and snap, making a sound like the clicking of a gun-lock, broke upon the stillness of the night and relieved the monotony of that ceaseless whirl. They could see hundreds of glassy eyes, shining like balls of fire, and almost feel the heated breath of the maddened brutes as they rushed madly about them.

"Well, this is a rum go;" suggested Davie, regaining his self-possession in the face of their great danger. "What are we going to do anyhow, pard? if we make a break for the trees, the crazy brutes will grab us before we have taken a dozen steps; 'tain't no use to shoot. We



couldn't kill more than a dozen, with the best of luck, and that would make the hundreds left all the crazier.

"If we only had some fire to throw at them, that would fix them, but we haven't got a thing to make a spark. I'm stumped, old man. You say what to do, and be devilish quick about it, for if we hesitate long, they will be upon us."

"You and I have been in some pretty tight places," responded his companion, "and we always got out of them somehow, so I guess we'll get out of this one, although it looks like we'll have to roost in the trees all night, like a couple of turkey-cocks, and we won't have any feathers to keep our ugly legs from freezing, either."

"This is how we will work them: keep your back to mine; and you see those maples?"—pointing to a clump of trees, with low, wide-spreading branches,—“well, we must make for them; not too fast nor too slow either,—just a steady, quick pace. When we get near enough, I'll shoot; then you must jump for your life. If you grab a limb and draw yourself up quickly, you're all right, so far, but I warn you make no mistake; if you miss your hold the first time, you're a goner. The panting devils will be at your throat, and drinking your black blood before you can have a second chance."

Acting upon this plan promptly, the two men began at once to move towards the only trees that were near them with branches low enough for them to make a swift ascent.

At first, the hungry wolves, with their red tongues hanging far out from between their distended jaws, their white teeth gleaming in the darkness, swerved perceptibly; and again drew even closer to their intended victims. However, their natural cowardice delayed the attack until the



sharp report of a pistol rang out upon the night air, the men having reached their desired haven.

Skinner's cunning gained for him a slight advantage over the other man, as he was facing the trees and prepared to spring the moment he gave the signal, while the man called Davie must turn and in doing so hesitate a moment before selecting his objective point and making the leap.

The wolves were upon them at the moment they gained the foot of the maple and, as the sligher of the two men grasped a low branch just above his head, as he turned, one of them buried his fangs deep in the poor man's thigh.

With desperation, crying out with pain, Davie dragged himself up into the tree, his exertion breaking loose the hold of the vicious brute that had seized him ; but the powerful jaws carried with them, in their vice-like grip, a long strip of flesh, the blood flowing profusely from the wound.

Although almost fainting, smarting from the first intense pain, he had no sooner gained a position in the tree than he shouted to his companion, endeavoring to make himself heard above the snarling of the wild brutes as they fought, crazed by the smell and taste of blood.

But no answer came back to him, for Skinner in his haste had jumped at a dead and withered branch, which broke under his weight and precipitated him helpless upon the ground. In an instant the famished beasts were upon him, tearing his limbs and flesh, and without a cry he was rendered a shapeless mass. In a moment more, his bones, stripped of every particle of flesh, were all that was left of what almost an instant before had been a hale and hearty human being.



Davie, soon realizing in an indistinct way what had happened to his old "pard," remained in the tree through the long cheerless night, surrounded by the howling wolves, who disappeared with the breaking of the dawn.

Soon as he found it safe, he dropped to the ground, more dead than alive from loss of blood and inaction on such a cold night. Giving hardly a thought to the dead man who had been his only friend, he crept back to the trappers' camp, with the hope of gaining aid to his recovery and among the lawless crowd he rightly judged the gypsies were composed of, to find a new partner in furthering his plans of crime.

But the exertion proved too much for him, and by the time he reached the camp the ragged wound was bleeding afresh. He remained conscious long enough to tell of the incident of the night—how his friend met his death and the cause of his present ghastly condition, and then expired.

The rough Bohemians gave little credit to his tale and, chopping a hole in the ice, forced the body into it, as being the easiest way of getting rid of a useless annoyance. The incident passed for a time entirely out of their minds, so used were they to death in all its phases.



## CHAPTER VII.

DON GILBAR'S lucky star ruled that he should not be left alone to suffer and die.

Loving hands administered to his wants and fond, passionate eyes watched over him while he battled with a fever that was fierce while it lasted ; until finally he awoke, with his mind clear and his bright, quick intellect instantly on the alert, as a slight moisture dampened his brow.

Most bewitchingly delightful emotions permeated his whole being, and he gave no thought to the whys and wherefores of his enchanting surroundings. The bracing aroma of burning pines filled his broad chest and deep lungs, as he drew in long draughts of scented air.

His senses were soothed and at the same time rendered sensitively alive as there was wafted to his ears soft, low music, only a little short of heavenly, and not to be easily accredited to human instrumentality, while Don's big shining eyes were fixed with a rapturous intensity upon a creature of such startling and exquisite beauty, heightened by the mysterious charms of the whole surroundings, that he taxed his awakening brain for some feasible clue or explanation of where he had been transported.

Some twenty yards distant, reclining on a heap of skins, was a woman ; her contour simply divine.

The face was not plainly visible ; one arm, strong but



molded with the most perfect symmetry, supported her head; the abundant wealth of thick golden hair, reaching to her feet in wavy masses, failed to conceal entirely the entrancing beauty of her undulating bosom; delicately wrought sandals were bound upon her feet; her robes were of the finest texture, lined with white fur and encircled by a jeweled girdle, parted sufficiently to expose a limb of tempting grace.

The shapely fingers of her disengaged hand touched lightly the strings of her lyre, as the echoes passed from niche to arc the melody of her sweet lullaby.

Don gazed and wondered, not unconscious of the natural beauties of the vaulted chambers in which he found himself.

A bright fire blazed near him, making the only light; but this filled every space with a cheerful glow. He was fascinated and feared to move or make a sound, lest the whole scene should be dispelled as a dream.

Soon, however, the music ceased and the fair musician turned and looked steadily at him without the slightest hesitation or embarrassment, and as she drew near, inquired:

“Does the stranger want anything? May Minna bring meat, or drink to him?”

“Well, no,” replied Don, “I am not needing anything just at present, excepting some information. Won’t you kindly tell me where I am and how I came here? I am at a loss to understand what all this is about or to whom I am indebted for the pleasure of this meeting?”

“Pardon me; won’t you sit down?” pointing to a flat rock at her side, “I find I am unable to rise”—this, as Don made an effort to stand up, from his couch of leaves and blankets.



“Come, please be seated and tell me who you are and at the same time it might not be amiss to tell me who I am, for I do not believe I know one much better than I do the other.”

“I am Minna, that’s all I know ; as for you, I found you near here and have nursed you back to life. I know not who you are and no one knows you are here save Minna.

“My life has been a burden, although every gift within the power of a gypsy has been lavished upon me ; yet they do not love me ; they fear me and I *hate* them. I have bided my time, feeding my heart on hatred, until I found you. Since then there has been something for me to live for.

“Here we will end our days ; Minna will provide for both. You are mine : I found you and gave you life, and will now soon restore you to the great strength and beauty that must have once been yours. You will be my pleasure, my life, my self.”

Don was enraptured with the voluptuous beauty before him ; it was just such as would appeal to his manly disposition.

But with the deepest regret, he noted the unintelligible expression of the great, black-blue eyes that pierced him through and through with their latent fire. He loved her on the instant ; his heart, that had for years lain dormant, irresponsive to the charms of the world’s fairest women, in a moment blazed into a love that was to grow, never flagging or dimming, during the vicissitudes of a long, eventful life.

Yet he could see that she was to be feared. Was her mind at fault, or was it only an untamed, wild nature that controlled her actions ? Although helpless and weak



Don, in remembering his past strength, did not fully realize his feebleness, as he replied :

“ Well, Minna, since you claim that as your only name, I must thank you for your very complimentary suggestion that I have met with more favor in your eyes than those with whom you have been associated, but I think I will very soon be my old self again ; and, if we are anywhere in America, I must have friends who will love you, as I already do, and we—might—get along—in the world—with—out—your—providing—for me.”

Don's voice sank lower and lower, as his eyes closed, and he began a sweet, restful slumber.

Some unknown influence pervaded the cave and seemed to do with him as it willed ; so that his speaking had been very little of what he wished to say.

But his companion paid not the slightest heed to his last ramblings, apparently not hearing a word. As she noted his quiet breathing, a look of the purest, heavenly delight passed swiftly over her face.

Then, parting the lips of the sleeping man with her careful fingers, she dropped some dark liquid between them, pressing a long fervent kiss upon his now cool brow, then nestled her cheek to his, while the masses of her wondrous hair, gathered away from her queenly head, lay bright and shining in the firelight upon the polished stone.

Some fifteen years before the incidents just narrated, a little child had strayed from home and was picked up by a band of strolling gypsies in whose company there was one with sufficient of a mother's instinct yet remaining, it seemed, to pity the helpless little flower, and who apparently gave little thought as to where it came from or how it happened to be alone in a thinly settled country.



The child grew strong and hearty under the rough but wholesome treatment it received, until, at the age of eight, one day a brutal ruffian, in a fit of passion at some trivial piece of mischief, struck the little girl a blow upon her head, almost costing her her life.

However, in time she entirely recovered physically, although mentally she was never the same. Keeping to herself, giving advice of merit far beyond her years, effecting wonderful cures from the herbs and roots she seemed to discover by instinct, as those who were her only companions were at times laid low with sickness or wounds to which the whole human race is more or less subject; predicting storms or fair weather, as the case might be; prophesying, with never-failing success, abundant crops, or seasons of want:—all this, coupled with her dazzling beauty as she grew and developed into womanhood, caused her to be regarded by the ever superstitious people about her with awe and reverence.

They had been a successful band and lavished upon her the most extravagant of their, at times, ill-gotten booty. She could have ruled them as she willed; but she took no interest in their coming or going, remaining as it were, apart and to herself; accepting their rich gifts as her right; at times, being absent from the camp for days as they journeyed into different sections of the great West. When she was away strife and quarreling and bloodshed ran riot; but on her appearing among them again, her simple presence quelled their heated passions, and peace and quiet reigned supreme.

They had traveled for months to gain the spot where we found them in a preceding chapter, as the fame of that locality had gone abroad as being a section rich for the trapper and hunter; so they established their camp,



with the intention of remaining until the snow should disappear in the following Spring.

On the day of their arrival, which was the evening of the day Bill Skinner and his companion started on the fated journey from Pleasantville to the cave, Minna had been attracted to the banks of the stream by the barking of a large wolf-hound, and instinctively peering far in between the rocks, she rightly judged that this might be the opening to a cave; and although not thinking it of much extent, thought it might afford her a shelter more suited to her tastes during the long Winter just before her when she would naturally be very much confined by the heavy snows and rough weather incident to a Winter in that climate.

Putting her thoughts into action, she fearlessly sought her way through the intricate passages until she discovered Don, whom she nursed and cared for with the most loving tenderness. With her own strength she moved the helpless man, while yet unconscious, to a dryer and much more healthy chamber in the cave—for she had explored it in all directions, finding a succession of beautiful subterranean passages and vaulted caverns. With jealous care she guarded the secret of her discoveries; and so directed her coming and going as to avoid suspicion.

Being busy with their various pursuits, the gypsies took no notice of her absence; so she spent several days and nights of almost ceaseless watching and care, until her efforts were rewarded by her charge awakening to consciousness and again passing off into a natural health-giving slumber.

All Winter long she nursed him back to his accustomed health and strength. It was slow at first; but as he became used to the diet and surroundings he gained more rapidly.



Minna loved him as a lioness would her wounded mate. While he was feeble and dependent upon her for his every want, she was all tenderness, watchful, anticipating his slightest wish ; while, had he been possessed of his full might and graceful strength, she undoubtedly would have been imperious and contentious, from her over-ruling worship of him.

By the use of a potent but harmless drug, she kept Don unconscious when it was necessary for her to be absent : so that as she was always with him during his waking moments, it added to the mysteries of the situation how she could provide for them as she did.

In proportion as Don gained in vitality, he besought her to come away with him. He told her of the beautiful city, of the wealth and pleasures with which he would surround her.

“ You would be queen, darling, of them all,” he urged, “ with your grand and majestic beauty. You would reign without a rival in the whole world of fashion.”

But the wild-flower of the plains said :

“ No. Minna would lose her sun if she should permit him to go from her sight, and then she would chill and die in the shadows of the high buildings of the great city.”

“ Well, you do not expect me to end my days in this hole ; you pretend to love me, and I have repeatedly assured you that were I free you would be in no danger of losing me, as my infatuation for you would be greater than any other influence that could be brought to bear upon me.”

But Minna was inflexible, and so the Winter passed.

Don had lost all count of time, and the seasons, day and night, were one to him. He could not know whether



it had been months or years that he had been imprisoned by this beautiful jailer in his sparkling cell. His strange companion permitted him to seek in all directions for some opening or place of egress; but no opening could Don find, look as he would.

As Spring approached, the gypsies began to plan for breaking camp and moving to new scenes.

The winter had been profitable to them and they had an unusual amount of skins to barter and trade on, so soon as the weather permitted of their moving and they could reach a city of sufficient size in which to dispose of their plunder to the best advantage. Minna being apprised of their intentions in a number of ways, without expressing herself had fully decided they should depart without her.

She came to this conclusion with very little regret. These people had been good to her, in a way, but there wasn't the slightest particle of affection between them and her; so that she could have left them at any time that her interests, no matter how slight, might call her in another direction. Hence, her heart and soul being rapt up in the object of her affection, their departure had very little weight with her.

When the day for them to leave finally came, Minna thought, with a species of cunning, that she would start and remain with them for a few days and then swiftly return. Knowing their characteristics so well, she felt that when they once became interested in their new designs, they would have little care, nor trouble themselves upon her account.

On the morning of the day on which Minna and the gypsies departed, Don awoke from a deep sleep—caused by the drug usually administered by Minna before leaving



him—to find himself alone in the cave. It being the first time that such a thing had occurred, it caused Don more or less concern. He immediately arose from his improvised bed, and began to reconnoiter every part of his underground habitation.

Disappointed in his search at not finding even a trace of her he would seek, he threw himself with a deep-drawn sigh upon the bed of soft skins, on which, reclining in a queenly attitude, he had first set eyes on Minna.

He lay there for some time thinking over past events ; and the more he thought, the more he was brought to realize that he really loved this mysterious creature who had been his constant companion, through all these weeks or months, whichever it might be.

Strange as it may seem, after all, he had been contented and happy so long as she had been with him, gaining his health and strength, although deprived of all luxuries with which his previous life had been surrounded.

Where could his sprite be ? Was she something supernatural, that she could disappear through the face of the solid walls ? How had she ever come there ? Why was he there, and had she tired of him and left him to starve and die alone ?

Growing more excited as these thoughts rushed through his mind, he began pulling about the magnificent skins impetuously, disclosing to his utter astonishment an opening under this elevated bed of rocks large enough to admit of a person passing through.

Without a moment's hesitation, he entered the aperture and pressing rapidly along a passage-way that widened as he proceeded, in a very short time emerged from his long captivity and found himself once more in the bright glare of God's sunlight, with a stream as clear as crystal



flowing at his feet, the pure air from heaven filling his lungs.

Minna had provided him with an assorted suit of clothes which she had purloined, a garment at a time, from the trappers, as his need required; so that, clad as he was, with his locks of long uneven length, he gazed at what seemed to him an apparition in nature's mirror—the clear brook at his feet.

He ejaculated, between bursts of hysterical laughter:

“How do you do, young fellow? Live about here anywhere? You do not mean to palm yourself off as Don Gilbar, do you? Come now, that's good! Ha! ha! ha!”

And then turning and gazing about him through the forest at the freshening grass with here and there a lone little flower, that like himself was struggling for freedom from its long Winter's captivity, he forgot all else, save his great joy at being free and once more upon the face of the earth.

As these emotions of joy were coursing through his veins, with almost crazy delight, his attention was arrested by the sound of voices and the cracking of the dead twigs as they broke under the heavy tread of a little company of men, some on horses and some on foot, which soon came in sight.

Upon discovering Don, they inquired:

“Is this the short cut to Silas Pemberton's farm? You look like a native, and we are not sure but we have lost our way.”

“Well, now, gentlemen,” replied Don, “if you don't know the way to Mister-what's-his-name's farm better than I do, you don't know much. I have only been here about ten minutes; can't say where I came from, do not



know where I am and have no immediate plans as to where I am going."

"Lost, are you?"

"Yes, and as I feel kind of lonesome, if it is agreeable to you, I would be pleased to join your party until you reach some settlement, at least."

"He seems kind of queer in his head," said the spokesman of the little crowd to his nearest comrade; "I don't suppose we will get much information out of him."

"But let the poor devil come long with us if he wants, and anyhow I am sure we'll come to old Silas's a little further up the creek; we must push ahead or we shan't make it by dark;" then turning and addressing Don, he continued:

"Come along, pard, if you have got stout limbs and are willing, perhaps we can make use of you; you seem to be down on your luck, and are wanting a job, I take it."

So they started on, Don falling in their wake, giving little thought as to who or what they were, so long as he had some one to pilot him out of the wilderness.

With more or less cursing and at times good-natured badinage, they pressed their way through the forest for several hours, until just before the sun was setting they came upon the edge of a well-kept farm, with its broad acres of pasture and miles of stake-and-rider rail fences.

Hundreds of cattle were feeding upon the succulent grass, and in the near distance could be seen the barns and the snowy white house, with its green shutters and massive chimney, from which a thin spiral column of smoke was rising, suggesting to the by now wearied travelers that some supper was being prepared.

Here they rested for the night and Don found he had fallen in with a party of cattle-men who made a business



of going about over the country purchasing cattle that were sufficiently fattened to be ready for the butcher's block.

It was their custom to go from farm to farm and buy in various numbers the cattle that had been fed on corn during the Winter, and as they procured sufficient to make a drove, the cattle would be taken to the nearest railroad station and shipped principally to Chicago.

Don, fearing that his tale would not be credited and for other reasons, made no statement as to his past, but engaged to aid in driving cattle, intending to communicate with his friends at the earliest possible moment.

The drovers knew of Squire Lykin and told Don that they were going to the old Squire's, in a week or ten days, to buy some cattle; and he, thinking that to be the quickest way to find Jack, decided to stay right with the drovers.

But weeks passed and still they failed to arrive at the Squire's place. As a matter of fact, they were journeying in an exactly opposite direction to that in which Don's friends lived.

The cattle-men were needing the assistance of a strong, able-bodied man, so they made excuse after excuse and promised that in a few days they would reach the old Squire's, until Don finally came to the conclusion that they were deceiving him.

Being assured of the fact by a farmer's boy at one of their stopping places one night, he started to retrace his steps alone, inquiring as best he could from farm to farm in the thinly-settled country until the morning he unexpectedly met Jack, he supposing when he started that morning on another day's tramp, that he would have many weary miles yet to travel.



## CHAPTER VIII.

"COME, boys, stir yourselves," called a manly voice, accompanying the words with a loud knocking at Don's and Jack's doors, the morning after they reached the prairie farm.

They were both tired from the exertions of the preceding day, so Stephen Lykin's voice and noise awoke them from a heavy sleep.

Their rooms were communicating and the doors between had been left open all night; Don, who had been dreaming of the fair-haired goddess and his Winter home within the rocky cave, was several moments realizing the change, his mind rapidly running over the incidents of the past few weeks and the previous day, accounting for his comfortable bed and the spacious room.

Meanwhile, Jack called to his brother:

"Come in, Steve."

And as Stephen opened the door, accepting the invitation, Jack good-naturedly pretended to growl:

"What is all this noise about? Can't you let a man sleep? You don't expect us to get up at this beastly hour, do you? Come, Steve, let's argue the question awhile."

Jack's brother knew this was a challenge to pull him out of bed, as he had so often done when they were boys; and Stephen, nothing loath for a little sport, accepted the banter; whereupon a tussle ensued, making



laughter and puffing, which finally ended in Jack's being landed on the floor, dragging the bed-clothes with him, but not until the bedstead had been more or less demolished in the rough play of the strong men.

During the fun Don had entered the room in dishabille and had watched the contest with rare zest.

"You are not much good, Jack, to let 'the old man' best you in that style. I wish I hadn't gotten up, so Stephen could have undertaken something nearer his size. I have a notion to put him to bed and show him what a man can do."

With this, he made a rush at Stephen, who evaded Don's grasp, by nimbly stepping aside, crying—

"No, no, boys; stop your foolishness. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves, acting like a pack of school-children."

But the fun had been started, and Don was unwilling that he should not have a share in a thing so much in his line, so he said:

"See, Jack, he is afraid of me. Now, Steve, if you will walk right in the other room and get into my bed, with your boots on and all just as you are, we'll let you off; but if you won't I'm going to put you there. I must have some revenge for your doing Jack up. Understand, I don't stand around and see any one impose on Jack."

Stephen was a broad-shouldered, muscular fellow, with a black, twinkling eye; and, although his full beard and hair were beginning to be sprinkled with gray, he had a young heart still, and besides was ever ready for anything in the line of sport and was not to be cowed even by so formidable an opponent as the athletic young man who was daring him to the playful encounter.

So the scuffle began anew, but this time Stephen found



he had a more skilful opponent; and but for his great strength, Stephen would have been very soon vanquished. As it was, before long Don landed him full length upon his bed and after giving him two or three thumps with a pillow, exclaimed:

“Now I have had my satisfaction; so get out of here and let us dress; it won’t take us long and we will be down in a jiffy.”

Stephen was laughing heartily, for he had enjoyed it all; and, as he beat a hasty retreat, he promised the young men that he would send a regiment of farm hands to get them out of bed next time, he being no match for border ruffians.

A moment later, Stephen’s strong voice was heard singing, as he took long strides towards the barn:

“Were it not for the bat that you hold in your paw,  
I’d show you a game played from Erin-go-bragh.”

Don and Jack dressed hastily and were in pretty fair time for breakfast.

“Tom Miller offers six cents for the cattle in the North lot, Jack,” began Stephen, “and take them all. I think they will average very close to sixteen hundred pounds, and they are as smooth a lot as we ever fed out. What do you say—shall we let them go at that?”

“You know better than I do, Steve,” replied Jack. “We could make them net us the quarter, or even a half, if we shipped them ourselves, I believe, but of course we would have to take the risk. I believe I am willing to close out my share at six cents for the fat cattle and four cents for the grass stock; and if you think best to hold for more money, why you can do so and pay me whenever you sell; anyhow, let us weigh all the cattle to-day, and



then we can judge better just what we are doing, and how we will come out."

"All right, Jack; we will weigh up to-day and try to fix your part up in some way, for I know you want to get away as soon as you can. So while the rest of you finish your breakfast, I will get the boys together and get ready."

As Stephen started out, Jack turned to Don with :

"What do you want to do, Don? Will you watch us weigh up the cattle, which may not be very interesting to you, or will you try the fishing? I can put you on the track of some good sport, I think, unless you feel lonely? What will it be, old man? You know you will have to entertain yourself somehow for a day or two, but the country is yours to roam over; so choose for yourself."

"Don't worry about me, Jack," returned Don; "just you go ahead and never mind me. I'll try the fishing to-day and decide more fully as to my plans by night."

And so how to put in the day was arranged.

An hour after, the shouts of the men as they urged the fat sleek steers on to the scales could be heard by Don, while his long, rapid strides left the farm-house and substantial out-buildings in the background. His powerful limbs soon carried him over two miles, through corn-fields and meadows and acres of waving grain that would ere long be ripe for the harvest.

So far he had, he felt sure, kept his course true toward the little river on the banks of which he expected to spend the day in trying to inveigle at least a few fish to his hook as proof of his skill, and in thinking out how he should return to the cave and in some way leave some sign that would make the queen of his heart know, should she ever return, that he loved her still and was waiting so



longingly for the "some day" when he should once more fold her to his ardent embrace.

But as he vaulted over a low hedge into a lane, the road diverged in two directions, so that he was at fault which to take. A few rods down the lane stood what seemed to be a blacksmith shop and the clear ring of the anvil, as though defying the sturdy blows being showered upon it, denoted that someone was at work therein; at the same time a little maiden could be seen coming toward Don, leisurely swinging her big Gainsborough as the lazy breeze stirred her long, sun-kissed curls.

She was a lovely child, but Don scarcely noticed that as he thought, in his practical way, to inquire of the little lady, or anyone else who knew, the road to Fisher's meadows, as that was his destination.

When Nellie Miller saw Don jump so lightly over the hedge into the road, she was at some little distance, but she regarded the feat with perfect wonder and amazement; for, while the farmer boys,—who were the only specimen of men she had so far seen,—were in many instances strong, robust fellows, none of them possessed the agility to go about over the country jumping hedges and fences at will.

Then, as Don drew nearer, walking with such a self-satisfied swing and looking in all directions and as yet giving her but a casual glance, she quickly thought:

"He must be conceited;" and the imps of mischief that were always roaming about her brain set to work framing the plan: "How can we give this 'Fine Gentleman' a good scare;" when, as they were almost in front of the smithy, coming from opposite directions, Miss Nellie spied a huge hound half asleep by the side of the door.



Then, quick as a flash, her lips parted in an enthusiastic smile, showing her pearly teeth and the big dimples in her cheeks, as, clapping her hands, she shouted :—

“ Sic ! Sic ! Sic ! ’em.”

But practical jokes often prove to be boomerangs, and in this instance Nellie’s little fun came near proving very serious.

The hound was a large powerful brute of a very surly temper, being a cross between a stag-hound and a large timber wolf. He was seldom let run at large, but this morning, owing to the carelessness of someone, the big fellow was loose and dozing before his master’s shop.

Upon Nellie calling to him, he rose slowly to his feet without a note or growl of warning and, curling his ugly black lips and exposing a double row of ivory-like fangs, sprang at the girl, owing to the fact, no doubt, that it was she who had wakened him from his comfortable nap and roused his ugly temper.

With two bounds the animal was upon her, but he overleaped his mark, and instead of at first fastening his long teeth in her throat, he struck her with his broad chest, knocking the poor child flat in the road ; but turning his huge length almost instantly, with a savage snarl of increased rage, his distended jaws were at her throat, as she lay motionless with fear, or stunned by the fall.

At the same instant Don was up with them, and grasping the hound by his throat and neck he forced him away from the brute’s intended victim, falling on one knee in the struggle.

The infuriated beast, now thoroughly aroused, this time rushed at Don, but young Gilbar was perfectly cool, his every action governed by a steady brain ; and as the dog came at him with open mouth, he clutched his upper



and lower jaw with either hand, and exerting his strength to the utmost, parted them until they fairly cracked.

With a howl of pain, the great brute rolled over in the dust; Don had dislocated his jaws, thus rendering the dog harmless.

Before letting go his hold, he administered a dozen resounding kicks with his heavy boots upon the hound's sides and then left him, a shapeless mass in the road, covered with blood and dust, more dead than alive; and then turning to the little girl, he coolly inquired:

"Are you hurt, child?"

"Oh, no, sir," Nellie replied, as she arose from the road, where she had been watching the struggle, with big eyes from which the tears were still flowing.

She had almost forgotten her fright in admiration of Don's manful fight, but the excitement had caused the tears.

"That is," she added, "my hand hurts me a little where I guess you stepped on it; but that's nothing. And, goodness! but you are strong and brave and so good; because I meant the dog should frighten you, and yet you came and kept him from hurting me. Why didn't you let him eat me up? It would have served me right."

"That's so," laughed Don, "only you are such a sweet, plump morsel, I thought I would like to eat you myself, so I drove the dog away. But let me look at your hand."

"Did I do that?" Don continued, as he took the bruised little digits between his own handsome palms. "That was very awkward of me, I must say; but I did not have time to choose my steps. Let us go in the shop and see if we can't find some water and something



to bind up the poor little wound; does it pain you much?"

"Oh, that was nothing; I think it was fun, only I was very much frightened when that big fellow jumped at me."

Up to this time, the heavy blows on the anvil had continued without ceasing, and even after Don had pushed open the door, the sturdy blacksmith kept up his pounding a moment, so he could beat the red iron into shape before it cooled. Then turning to the new-comers, he asked:

"Well, what is it? Hollo there, Nellie; come to pay the old man a visit?"

"Yes," replied Nellie, "I came to tell you father must have his plow to-day; you promised it last week and he is swearing mad at you for keeping him waiting so; and then, just as I reached the shop, that big dog came at me and would have eaten me had not this kind gentleman driven him off and nearly killed him; guess he is dead by now."

"What's that?" cried old Peterson.

"But you should have seen the fight," said Nellie, not noticing the interruption. "It was just splendid! He grabbed the dog just so—Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Miss Miller with pain, the big tears once more starting in her eyes.

She had forgotten her bruised hand in the excitement of telling the blacksmith of her adventure, until she had grasped old Tom Peterson's leather apron to demonstrate how Don took the hound; when the pain caused her to cry out.

"He is harmless enough now," called Don quickly, as old Tom ran out of the door with his big hammer in his



fist. But the old blacksmith never halted until his long strides carried him across the road, to where the dog still lay.

When he came up to the savage beast, and found him all covered with blood and dust, he dealt a few swift, strong blows on the brute's head that took what little life there was left in him.

"I guess he won't ever fly at anyone again," Peterson said to himself as he recrossed the road. "My Lord! what if he had killed little Nellie! How the devil did he get loose, anyhow? Well, he is safe enough now, that's one thing sure."

Nellie was the pet of the neighborhood, and for harm to come near her was a serious matter in the eyes of Tom Peterson; had it been anyone else, it would have been of much less consequence.

Nellie and Don together gave the old smith a pretty good idea of the whole affair and after that, as Don's part in the affray became generally known with the embellishments that were added to the tale as it spread, Nellie's hero could have had the county for the asking.

Don tied up the little fingers carefully in his big handkerchief; the old blacksmith promised the plow, sure, that day; and then, upon Don's explaining his plans for the day, little Nellie begged to go along.

She knew the short cut to Fisher's meadows and exactly the best place to fish; she would keep just as still; please let her go; Mr. Peterson could stop on his way home to dinner and tell her folks where she was; it would only be a little out of his way.

So Don gained a pilot for his bravery, if nothing more. Very demurely did Miss Nellie trot along by the side of her handsome companion, until they had gone some dis-



tance down the dusty lane, when she halted a moment, with :

“ Say, what is your name ? you have never told me and we can’t talk to each other unless we know our names ; mine is Nellie Miller.”

“ And mine is Don Gilbar,” replied Don, “ and I am very much pleased to meet you, Miss Nellie. You are such a beautiful child that I trust you are not naughty as you would lead one to imagine, sicking big dogs on to strangers who never did you any harm.”

“ Well, Mr. Gilbar, I guess I *am* bad. But everyone likes me excepting you, and I wouldn’t do anything to harm you now, because I like you better than anyone I ever knew.”

“ What makes you think I don’t like you ?” laughed Don.

“ Well, because you didn’t look as if you did,” replied Nellie, “ when you first saw me to-day. Anyone else would have noticed me, but I really believe you would have passed right on and never given me a thought had you not seen me about to be eaten up.”

The big tears again stood in the sensitive child’s eyes, partly at the remembrance of her supposed slight and partly from nervousness at the recollection of her recent danger.

“ Come, come, Nellie,” Don began, “ you must not mind me, for I am a big, rude fellow, and do not appreciate young ladies as I should ; but am very sure I am proud to know you think so much of me already and shall try very hard to always hold your admiration. Now don’t be blue any more, for my heart is heavy and you must cheer me up.”

And indeed Don’s little companion did cheer him, as



they trod along through the fields. She was so naive and bright and wonderfully quick, for her years, that she proved excellent company and able to sustain her part in the conversation that would naturally seem beyond one of her age.

The time seemed short to both that they consumed in reaching the banks of a beautiful little stream, that was winding its way to the broad river, now rushing merrily over the smooth white pebbles, the fleecy froth on its pure bosom seeming to denote great haste and stress in its hurry to reach the end; and then again, as if exhausted, further down it would rest in some cool, deep, dark pool, grateful for the shade of the wide-spreading elms and willows upon its banks. As they paused along the edge of one of these dark places, Nellie insisted:

“Now, Mr. Don, if you can’t catch some fish here you don’t amount to much, and I do hope you will get a good long string, then you will not say I am a hoodoo.’”

So Don set to work and in an hour had landed a good basket full of various sized perch and cat-fish so easily that he was tired of what was no great sport. After enjoying their lunch, he lit a cigar and, stretching himself on the soft grass, listened in a drowsy way to his vivacious companion’s ceaseless gossip.

Nellie told him the legend of the whole surrounding country, gave him in detail, the history of the scattered families so far back as her personal knowledge carried her added to the reminiscences of all the old settlers in the community; she was in her element; and in his half sleepy state Don was surely a very model audience, being possessed of his faculties in a sufficient degree, together with his inborn politeness, to at intervals ejaculate:



“Is that so? Well, I declare! You don’t tell me?” and such like original phrases.

At times he was awakened to a hearty laugh by some of Nellie’s witty sayings. After a time she began to bemoan to Don her lack of having seen the great world beyond in the city.

“As papa and I were coming from Pleasantville last week,” went on Nellie, “we stopped to feed the horses about six miles out, and while papa was asleep I went down to Spring Creek, and while I was throwing stones in the water, there came to me the most beautiful lady, with piles and piles of yellow hair wound around her head.”

“What’s that?” cried Don jumping up, wide-awake in an instant and grasping the child rudely by the arm, “what are you telling me, Nellie?”

“Why, nothing yet,” replied his companion; I was just going to tell you something. What did I say that has excited you so? It’s the truth I am telling you.”

“Well, well, I beg your pardon,” said Don, once more settling back upon the soft grass. “Go on and tell me the truth, as you started. I promise not to disturb you again.”

So Nellie continued: “Well, as I was saying, such a magnificent young lady came to me. Oh! she was the most beautiful being I ever saw! I thought she must be a water nymph, such immense quantities of lovely hair: and she was dressed so funny; only I know there are no such things, except in books. She had an unearthly look about her, but she spoke kindly to me, as she said:

“‘Little girl, where do you live?’

“‘Oh, about ten miles up in the country,’ I said.

“‘Then I fear you cannot help me any,’ she said, and



she seemed so disappointed and such a sad look came over her beautiful face that I ran up to her and took her hand, asking her what it was that troubled her. I didn't suppose that I could do much, but I felt at that minute I would do everything in the world I could for her.

"Then we sat down on a large, flat rock and she told me that she wanted to go to the 'big city;' that she *must* go; it meant more than everything in the world to her—why, she did not tell me.

"She spoke so lovely but queer of herself, how she had always lived right out in the woods and upon the prairies, having no one to mind, and how she could do just as she pleased the same as the big buzzards that were flying above us.

"But it seemed somehow something had happened to change her every way, and she wanted to get away from the country which she knew all about to some city where she would not know how to get about at all, nor she didn't even know how to get there. Somehow she seemed kind of frightened about where she should go or what she should do after she got there.

"We seemed to get along together right from the first, and I tell you, Mr. Gilbar, I promised to meet her on the same spot the first Monday after the new moon and we were then to arrange some plan by which we could together go to the 'city.' I won't tire you by telling how this all came about; in fact, I hardly know any more, but it was with that promise we parted. Now, there are only five more days until I must see her, and I don't know one bit more what we will do, or how we will get to the city, than I did yesterday, or the week before. Papa would never say I could go, and the more I think of leaving without his permission, the more frightened I get. I have



talked some to Tom Paxson; you know he says he is going to marry me soon as I grow up."

Don did not know this; in fact, until that moment, he had never heard of the aforesaid Tom Paxson; but he made no reply, as it was not necessary, and he was determined not to break the chain of Nellie's thoughts, so intensely interested was he and so more than anxious to learn the facts and details of a story that the narrator little thought was of such vital importance to her audience.

"Now I think," continued Nellie, "Tom's a fool; and I would die an old maid before I would marry him. If I only could, I should like to marry someone like you, Mr. Don, when I am old enough. But Tom is good to me, so sometimes I let him hold my hand"—this with a merry twinkle in her eye,—“at the same time I always tell him that I am too young to know anything about getting married."

"So you are going to New York next week?" broke in Don. The conversation was beginning to grow very tiresome, and he thought best to bring the little maiden back to the point, lest her childish mind should stray away entirely from that which was of interest to him.

"Oh, yes," replied Nellie. "What will I do? Can't you help me? Can't you find the way to New York and tell me how to coax papa to let me go?"

"Now I tell you," returned Don, jumping up from the grass, "don't you say a word to anyone else of all you have just been telling me, not even to your father or this Tom of yours, and let me think it out, and I believe we can hit on some plan that will enable you to see New York City, together with your friend, and to have you go with the full consent of your father. But let us not talk



of it more to-day ; just keep your own counsel and I will do the rest. It is time now we were going home. Where do you live, anyhow ? You know I am visiting at Stephen Lykin's. Is your father's farm near Stephen's ?"

"Only about a mile," said Nellie, "and you go right by our place."

With that they gathered up their fish and tackle and a brisk walk soon brought them to Miller's farm.

"You have such a neat, lovely home that I wonder you are willing to leave it," said Don, as they reached the gate.

"No, thank you, I won't stop this evening," he continued, in reply to Nellie's hearty invitation to stay for supper, but I may walk back to-night and see Mr. Miller, or if not, I will be over some time to-morrow, sure ; so good-bye, Nellie. You never will know how much good you have done me to-day, but I may be able to make it up to you very soon. Now mind, not a word to anyone."

And lifting his hat, as courteously as he would have done to a queen, he strode up the road, his mind intent on a great plan that was rapidly assuming shape in his brain.

Nellie watched him until he was out of sight, then she said, half aloud :

"I never thought there were such magnificent people in the world."

And then she ran merrily up the broad path to the house.



## CHAPTER IX.

"WELL, Jack, I suppose you are pretty well tired out after your hard day's work. I congratulate you and am truly very much pleased that your cattle weighed out so much better than you expected.

"Now I have a long story to tell you and have come to a point where I think you can be of the greatest assistance to me, should my plans succeed, as I am very hopeful they will. You will, in the first place, be doing an inestimable favor to the man who would lay down his life for you, if it were necessary; then you will also do a beneficent act to a fellow-creature at present denied the full exercise of all the faculties with which we should be naturally endowed; and in addition to these, should you succeed at what I am aiming, it will be a master stroke in your profession.

"Come, now, where can we go to be uninterrupted, where you can rest your weary limbs?—although what I am about to tell you, I think, will drive all fatigue away."

A happy light came into Jack's eyes, followed by a look of great interest, while Don was so earnestly soliciting his attention. The day's labors were over and the two young men had just come forth from a supper made more enjoyable by Don's contribution of the spoils of his day's efforts. As he lit his pipe, Jack placed one hand on his companion's shoulder and replied:

"Don, I know you are going to tell me about your strange disappearance and, stranger still, how you could



have been alive, and, at the same time, the extensive and extended efforts to find you all have failed. More than that, of course, I cannot surmise as to what you have to say; but do not have any anxiety about my lack of vitality. We have put in a full day and I was pretty well tired out, but we have just had a hearty meal and what little you have said has driven all weariness from me, so that I am good for all night. These two old chairs look inviting. Let us sit down; and I assure you you have my undivided attention."

And then it was that Don narrated his experience during the long Winter months, giving Jack the minutest details of each incident as it occurred, interspersing the plain facts with the thoughts and impressions which were made upon him from time to time.

It was long into the night before Don had told all. The night air had grown very chilly, but neither noticed this in their intense interest.

As Don paused, before proceeding further with what was so wholly occupying his mind, the cocks could be heard crowing for the midnight hour; first one lusty fellow, near at hand, who was answered almost instantly by another on some far-distant farm; then others took up, and passed along the shrill notes which seemed to say, "All's well," until as a cordon of sentinels the circle was completed.

"Now, Jack, this is my idea," continued Don: "Minna is as pure and lovely as the fairest lily. There is undoubtedly some great mystery connected with her past. She has great self-will and strong character; but there is no use talking, there is something wrong in her head. Her brain is not altogether right, that is certain; and you are the man to not only know just what is the matter, but to remedy it.



“From what I know of her, and little Nellie has to-day strengthened this opinion, she is determined to go to New York City. Now Nellie will see her again in a few days, which is most fortunate for us, and I want you to be present at this meeting. Nellie and Minna both feel that some one must aid them in accomplishing their wishes to go East. Nellie knows you very well, and has the utmost confidence in you, as well as has her father, no doubt. Now what is the matter with our going over there to-morrow? Or, better still, you say her father is coming here in the morning to get your answer about buying your cattle. He knows, as well as we all do, that you are expecting to go to New York in a week or ten days, or just as soon as you can wind up your business here. Cannot you, or I, or both of us, coax the old farmer to let Nellie spend a year or so in New York with my people! Maud would be good to her for our sakes; besides, I believe she would love her for her own sake. Little Nellie is a very bright, promising child.

“If old Miller consents, we will have made a big start; for then Minna will go right along, as a matter of course. As the girls have already been plotting and scheming how to get to the city, they will regard you as a veritable Moses; only I mean for you to go Moses one better and get into the promised land yourself, along with the children. Now, I cannot see why so far we haven't plain sailing.

“Then I want you to study Minna carefully, find out what is the matter; for I do not believe her strange ways are natural. At the same time I am sure I do not know what is the matter. If there is any possibility of clearing her mind or strengthening it, why do it, Jack, regardless of expense. Come, now, what do you say?”

After Don ceased talking there was an ominous silence.



Don's thoughts ran on into the future ; so confident was he of the young doctor's co-operation that it hardly occurred to him that it was necessary for Jack to pledge his aid in words. It almost startled him when Jack replied :

"Well, Don, what you have been telling me is indeed very remarkable. From other lips than yours I doubt if I would credit a word of it ; and anyhow, pardon me for saying so, it takes an immense amount of faith for me to believe that you could be shut up for weeks and months in a cave with a crazy woman. And the strangest part of all is that you should fall in love with her. I must say, taking it all together, it's a pretty big one you have been giving me."

"You surely do not think I have been lying to you ?" exclaimed Don, jumping up. "What object could I have ?"

"Hold on," returned Jack, "do not get excited. You must understand and appreciate how very, very strange it all seems to me."

"Jack, will you help me, or will you not ? that is what I want to know," said Don, evidently much hurt by his friend's manner. "There is no need of our discussing whether I have been telling you the truth or not. I am not asking you for any money that you need think it is a 'Bunco Game,' nor is there anything in it, either, that need jeopardize your reputation."

"What have I said to irritate you so ?" broke in Jack. "I haven't refused to do what I can to further your happiness ; but I must think this over a little. Now, for one thing ; what will you be doing while I am traveling over the country with two fascinating young ladies, barring one being a little daft ?"



“Of course you will do your part,” asserted Don, “and I will overlook your speaking so lightly of a very serious matter. There is nothing to be gained by getting mad. I wrote on yesterday to Maud, telling her that I was alive and well and that I would be home in a few days; that my adventures, since I saw her dear little face last, were too numerous to write and for her to break the intelligence of my coming gently to father and mother. In substance that is about all I wrote her.

“My idea would be to remain here until you three had had a conference and we could advise together as to what would be the best course to adopt with Minna—where would be the best place for her to go, as for every reason it would not do for her to go to my home.

“I now think it will be best for me to go on to New York first, in advance of the rest of you, so I can arrange any details there that may be necessary before your coming; but all this we can decide after you have seen her.”

“All right, Don,” said Jack, “I am with you heart and soul in any enterprise that I can be persuaded is for your best interest.

“We can do no more to-night, so let us try to get a little sleep; and in the morning I will engage myself in your behalf, in so far as gaining Miller’s consent to Nellie’s going to New York is concerned, and I will also see your Minna; further than that, do not ask me to promise more than I have. We will be guided by circumstances as we come to them.”

The following morning broke bright and clear, with every indication of a hot day. Both of the young men were among the first to stir on the farm. Don had not slept at all, while Jack’s slumbers had been very light and troubled.



His mind was very much burdened with what Don had told him. Knowing young Gilbar as intimately as he did, he felt that his fearless and even reckless disposition would render turning him from anything he had set his mind upon next to impossible, and the young doctor thought with perfect horror of a young man of Don's brilliant prospects devoting his life and energies to an insane woman. He especially dreaded this state of affairs because of his extreme fondness for Don.

There was no question but that young Gilbar was completely enamored of this being, who was especially fascinating to him because of the mystery and uncertainty of her past and future. Anyhow, Jack decided that the only thing to do was to apparently favor Don in all his plans and to trust to the future for a way out of the present perplexing difficulties.

"How d'ye, boys?" sang out old Miller as he rode into the yard about an hour after the sun was up. "Well, are you in a selling humor this morning, Jack?"

"Oh, this is Mr. Gilbar I reckon," as he grasped Don by the hand; "I am glad to know you, sir, and want to thank you for doing my little girl such a good turn yesterday. Don't know what old Tom would do if anything should happen to Nellie. I promised her I would bring you home with me to-day; she feels very grateful to you."

"Oh, that's nothing," replied Don, with his usual sangfroid, "I had forgotten all about it and I am sure she helped me through with a long day in such a pleasant manner that it is I who am her debtor. Nellie is a very sweet child. I have taken quite an interest in her. I was just saying to Jack here that I would be pleased to have her spend a while with my sister and mother in New York."



Don was going right at the subject uppermost in his mind.

"It would do her good, Mr. Miller," he continued, "and I am sure my sister would be only too glad to have such a dear, cheerful little companion as Nellie. Jack agrees with me that it would be just the thing. How does it strike you?"

"Well now, boys, I don't know about this. I am much obliged to you, Mr. Gilbar, for your invitation, and I know it isn't anything but kindness that led you to think of this for Nellie; so you mustn't think I do not value it when I say I think Nellie is better off at home. You agree with me, don't you, Jack?"

"I am not so sure about that," said Jack. "It would make Nellie happy, enlarge her ideas and make her a more useful woman to see something of city life. She is very bright naturally. Then, too, you know, as I" — here Jack hesitated a minute before he said, "am expecting to make Don's sister my wife in the near future, I would naturally think Nellie would be in the best of hands. I am going back soon myself, as you know, and would keep an eye on her, sending you prompt reports as to her health and behavior; and if anything should begin going amiss, we could ship her right home to you."

After considerable more discussion on the subject, Miller wound up the question for the time being, by saying:

"I suppose you will have it your own way, boys, so you have my consent. We will go home after a while and talk it over with mother. I guess she will be all right and think it a great thing for Nellie, but it will be durned hard on the old man to take his little girl away, even for a time."



As the old farmer thought of parting with his little darling, there was no doubt that his eyes filled with moisture, try to hide it as he would. And then, in a bigger, rougher voice, evidently to conceal his emotion, he finished with—

“No matter, if it is for her good.

“But come, Jack, let’s get to business. We will waste the whole day in talking. Have you and Stephen decided to let me have the cattle, or not?”

That day Jack and Stephen concluded a bargain with Miller for most of the cattle, and in a couple of days more Jack had finished up about all of his business affairs. Mrs. Miller’s consent had only too readily been given to Nellie’s accompanying Dr. Lykin back to New York, and on the next Monday Jack was to go with Nellie and be present at the meeting between her and Minna.

This meeting had been arranged for early enough in the day that Jack and Nellie could go on to old Squire Lykin’s farm the same afternoon.

As they all expected that Minna would accompany them to New York, the plan was to instruct Minna to meet them at the station in Pleasantville on the day and hour subsequently decided upon. In the meanwhile, Don was to ride to the Squire’s farm beforehand, and there await the report as to the result of this momentous meeting; for under no circumstances would it do for Minna to see Don. And this programme they carried out successfully.

Don rode thoughtfully from Stephen’s farm down to the Squire’s, where the family welcomed him warmly, having been apprised of his being in the land of the living after all. They were expecting to see him soon, but did not know the exact day of his coming.



The Squire went over the exciting ride, on that cold Winter's night, again and again. He liked Don from the first, and his regard was increasing all the time. Don gave them a tolerably accurate account of where and how he had spent the Winter, for some reason best known to himself carefully omitting any allusion to Minna, and at times, when driven in a close corner in his narrative, prevaricating so far as he deemed it necessary to hide from them as much as he wished at present.

Although the whole family could readily see that Don's tale was not entirely consistent in every detail, they were polite enough not to question him too closely, and in the main were satisfied with the explanation he gave of his mysterious disappearance for so long a time.

Jim and Don took to each other at once. It was not long before Jimmie decided that in Don he saw his beau-ideal of a man, while Don in turn was just suited with Jimmie's self-reliant and straightforward manner. So that, altogether, the time from Don's arrival until Monday evening passed more rapidly than he had hoped for. But when the hours of seven, eight and nine had passed and Dr. Lykin and his charge did not appear, they all grew a little anxious, while Don's restlessness was really growing painful.

Jack and Nellie left the farm in good time, so there would be no delay on their part at the trysting place. They drove in a little light wagon, Jack having some luggage they could in this way carry, as well as the few necessary articles Nellie took with her, though these were not many, as she expected as soon as she got to the city to provide an entirely new wardrobe.

They drove merrily along. Nellie, not realizing as yet that she was leaving home, did not have any homesick



feeling; so that she talked incessantly, and Dr. Lykin, feeling that he had once more started on a journey that would eventually end in the presence of his fiancée, was also in excellent spirits.

Nellie's meeting with Minna had been arranged for high noon, and a little before that hour they turned off from the main road and drove into a little clearing on the banks of Spring Creek. After waiting for some time beyond the appointed hour, as Minna did not come, they ate a portion of the very appetizing little lunch that Steve's wife had prepared for them. Still, the now anxiously-looked-for girl did not appear.

It was late in the afternoon, when their spirits had dropped to the lowest ebb, that Minna stood before them so suddenly as to startle them. In some of her mysterious ways she had been able to approach, her panther-like footfalls giving not the slightest warning of her coming.

There she stood in all her regal beauty, arrayed in deepest black. Her lovely face held them spellbound with its marvelous charms, the shining bands of her golden hair making a crown of rarer grandeur than the gold that graces the heads of Europe's rulers. Almost instantly she spoke to them, and her sweet voice seemed to permeate the air like the melody of a quaint refrain.

"Minna has kept you waiting, but the cause was beyond her power to prevent. No matter, she is here and thanks you for your faith in her that she would come, which your staying has proved. Minna is all ready. Do we go in yonder wagon, and has the little fairy provided a way and a guide? Come, speak, child; do we go at once?"

It was not what she said that impressed them so, but



her innocent and at the same time courtly confidence in the future.

Nellie quickly overcame to a great degree the feeling of awe that for the moment came over her, and going up to Minna, kissed her hand, as she said :

“Indeed you are late, you great big, naughty woman ; here you have kept us waiting so long. We were just about giving you up, but you are so beautiful and lovely one can’t be angry with you. This is Dr. Lykin, Minna.”

Minna slightly bowed her head, with the faintest smile in her eyes.

“He is going to New York to live. He has been there often, so knows all about it ; and he says we may go with him. It would take too long to drive there, but we will go in the cars ; we must be very good, at least I must,” remembering the parting instructions of her parents, “and do just as he tells me. The doctor is the best man in the world, and it is so kind of him to take us. We cannot start right away, I guess, but you tell her, Doctor, just what we are to do.”

During the brief colloquy Dr. Lykin had been observing Minna closely. There was something familiar about her, yet he was sure he had never met her, or anyone at all like her, in all his varied experience ; so he speedily dismissed that thought from his mind. There was no more surprise that Don, or any man, should fall passionately in love with such a being.

By this time the professional side of the young doctor’s character had asserted itself. And then he tried to hastily decide as to whether her mind was indeed some way affected. There was really nothing in her manner or what she said to establish this fact beyond a doubt. The odd way in which she expressed herself when talking



might be attributed to the manners and customs of the people among whom she had lived.

But as the doctor's mind rapidly recalled the incidents of the past Winter, as related to him by Don, he was forced to the conclusion that there was some mystery, something wrong with this Minna; or, possibly, it was Don's mind that had been weakened by the great stress brought to bear upon him. And so great is the influence of a beautiful woman over man that the doctor was disposed rather to think it was his friend Don who was half crazy.

As Nellie so deftly brought him into the conversation, he undertook his part in a matter-of-course sort of way.

"Our little friend here has explained to me, Minna—shall I address you so, or what may I call you?"

"Call me Minna, it is the only name I know."

"Well then, Minna, Nellie says you both want to go to New York. As I am going there and it would be no trouble, but a pleasure, to me to be your humble escort, and as Nellie is expecting to stay a while with some friends she has in the city, and as I suppose you are going to visit friends, I will endeavor to see you safely to their door. This is all very plain and easy, and my champion need not call me so kind and good for doing this simple act of courtesy."

"As to when we shall start: we had intended waiting upon your convenience in the matter; but I think I understood you to say you were ready now. Well, we can't exactly go to-day, but if it will suit you to meet us to-morrow morning at the depot in Pleasantville, at eight o'clock, I will get the tickets, so you will have no trouble. I suppose your father, or somebody, will see to getting



your trunks there in time, so that I can check them ; and I have no doubt we shall have a very pleasant journey."

Jack had stumbled through all this mainly to bring Minna out and induce her to say something about herself, without asking her what might seem to be impertinent questions.

He was not supposed to know anything about her, so that what he had said all sounded natural enough. Minna seated herself gracefully on a mossy rock, as Jack paused for her reply.

"The young doctor does not know Minna, so it is but natural that he should think as he has spoken. Minna has no friends ; she has needed them not, nor cared for them ; there were men who feared her and women who did her bidding, so that she has not known want. On the plains, in the fields and trackless timber, Minna is at home. She was never happy, but she was content until there came a great light into her heart that dazzled her with its brightness, and made her so happy that she suffered for very joy.

"Can you imagine that you were blind during the years of your lifetime until now, and then in an instant the black darkness would be swept away and yonder sun, just as it is now breaking through the clouds, should fall here at your feet ? So it was with Minna ; but soon she grew accustomed to the great light ; she lived upon it ; the chilled and frozen casement that had bound her heart melted away and it grew budding into a flower that could not be conceived elsewhere than in Paradise.

"Then there came a time when it was necessary for Minna to leave her sun ; when, upon returning in a day, she found she was once more alone in the world. Since then, and now, Minna has groped in darkness ; the blood



runs slowly through her veins and is congealing, as it flows to the heart; she believes she can find the light in the city, whither we intend to journey. If not, she can but die."

As the sad cadence of her voice died away, the pitiful tenderness of her tale appealed to the hearts of her listeners for the deepest sympathy.

"Minna, I think I understand, to a great extent, what you have been trying to tell me. I trust you will give me your confidence in full; I do not ask it now, nor is it necessary just yet, but believe that in me you have a friend, and what I can do to aid you shall be done."

Jack said this with such an earnest ring in his voice that he at once gained Minna's confidence, which was everything to start with.

And so they conversed, taking no heed of the rapidly passing time. Minna explained to them that she had quantities of dresses of every description, and that she had selected a few of the most suitable which were near at hand; leaving them to surmise how she could have been so well prepared. There would be money needed; and handing Dr. Lykin a good-sized casket, she told him it contained what could be converted into ample funds for her needs. She said all this in her own way at intervals, among many other things she told them.

The young doctor crossed her in nothing, but accepted all she told him as a matter of course; taking the casket, when offered him, in the same manner, without any visible curiosity.

Minna declined their invitation to go with them for the night, but would meet them, at the appointed time and place, on the morrow. The whole interview had been of such absorbing interest that Jack was greatly surprised as



he noticed, upon the conclusion of their arrangements and their being ready to depart, that the sun was setting ; so they could not complete their day's journey until after nightfall. Nellie had bidden Minna good-bye and sat perched up in the little wagon.

“ Well, good-bye, Minna,” said Jack ; “ we must be hurrying along, as we have some distance yet to go to-night. I think we understand each other so far, and I think of nothing more to be said or done to-night. Do not fail to meet us promptly to-morrow morning, a little before eight o'clock. You had better come in the north door of the depot, as I will be looking out there for you. You understand everything now, do you not ? ”

A bright smile spread over Minna's face, born of hope in the future and reliance in her new-found friends, as she replied :

“ Minna understands all, and will not keep you waiting in the morning. Good-bye,” and then, as Jack turned to leave, she shaded her eyes with one lovely hand, the other raised high over her head as she exclaimed :

“ Can this be the setting of the sun of Minna's destiny, or is it the beginning of a new life that will go on to endless prosperity and joy ? ” And so they left her.

It was a scene never to be forgotten. As she ceased speaking the fiery orb of heaven disappeared below the horizon—another day was done ; and the long shadows that had lain across their path disappeared, leaving no mark or impression of their recent presence. A cool, soft breeze stirred the branches above their heads, as one solitary star, bolder than its comrades, appeared in the sky ; it must have been the Star of Hope.

Jack and his companion hardly spoke as they drove slowly along the dusty road, each busy with his or her



own thoughts. Jack was too occupied to urge his team forward, so that it was quite late when they drove in the yard and up to the Squire's door.

"Where in the world have you been," accosted Jimmie, "keeping us all up until this late hour? You must have started mighty late, or something."

"That's right, Jim," interrupted Jack, "I depended on getting a blowing up from you. How do you do, father? Hullo, mother, are you all well?" Jack had alighted by this time and kissed his mother dutifully as he spoke to her.

"Oh, we are all pretty well," the good lady replied. Then the Squire shook hands with Jack, as he inquired: "How are you, Jack? What, is this my little sweetheart who has come to see me at last?" giving Nellie a hearty kiss as he lifted her from the wagon.

The Squire and little Nellie were old friends. The general handshaking went on a little longer, Don also quietly joining the group. He was pale with excitement, the anxiety of the day having visibly told upon him. Then the team was put away and the travelers, having partaken of the tasteful little supper prepared by good mother Lykin, the Squire called the family together, as was his custom, and after reading a chapter in the old Bible and repeating the same old prayer, word for word in the same tone, without rise or fall in his voice, as he had done for years, they all scattered, enabling Don to relieve his pent-up feelings with a host of questions which he put to Jack.

The young doctor's replies, in the main, were more than satisfactory, so that Don's spirits rose to the highest pitch.

As it was necessary for Don to reach New York City in advance of Jack and his party, the only way was for him



to start at two o'clock that night. If he did this and Jack should stop over in Chicago a day, it would give Don time to at least make temporary arrangements for Minna, and apprise his family of the guests that would so soon follow him. As nothing was so hard for Don to endure as inactivity, the idea of his starting practically at once just suited him.

So Don began saying good-bye, and as the family had expected him to leave early in the evening, which was the original intention, they did not think it strange that he went on the first train. Jack and Don's not making the journey together was explained by telling them that Jack might stop in Chicago several days, while Don was naturally anxious to see his family at the earliest possible moment after their mourning him as dead.

"Well, young man," said the Squire, addressing Don, "you never can tell how things are going to turn out. It's a fact, you have had some experience, a little too much experience I would say, since you came West; at the same time, you haven't learned much about our everyday life, and I wish you could stay longer."

"Oh, I have done pretty well," replied Don, "and I suppose I can come back again, some time. I tell you, we will get Jack settled, and for the first year or two Maud and he won't have much time for their big brother; so then you must let me come out here."

"Indeed we will," returned the Squire; "you will always be welcome; the horses are at your disposal, and we will try and fix it so you won't miss them much."

In the meanwhile, Jim and Nellie had been worrying each other. Neither being much troubled with bashfulness, it had not taken them long to become acquainted, and both being of a teasing disposition, they had quarreled



and made up a half dozen times within the hour. But as Jim was to drive Don over to the depot, it was time for them to depart; and although Jimmie started off growling at being kept up so late, as a matter of fact he was in a very good humor, had spent an especially pleasant evening and parted with Nellie the best of friends.

The sound of the horses' hoofs had hardly died away before the Squire's family were in bed and asleep, enjoying much-needed rest, after what was to them a long and rather exciting day.



## CHAPTER X.

"So, Jim, you will come to see me next Winter, won't you?" said Don, as he and Jimmie were bowling along on the road to the station.

"I reckon so," answered Jim; "that is, providing the Squire can get along without me."

"Oh, you can fix it some way, Jimmie, and I will take you around to see some of the fine horses, take you to the Club and show you how we box and fence. We'll make you see a good time in some way; there are lots of things I could show you that I don't suppose you ever dreamed of."

"By George! I am not afraid of that," replied Jimmie, "and I am anxious enough to come; but you know how it is, they can't do anything here without me. The Squire has always been good to me, so I wouldn't want to leave him in a tight place; but we will fix it up some way, and I think you may count on seeing me some time next Winter."

Jim said this as they drove up to the platform at the depot. His passenger sprang to the ground just as soon as they stopped and, after Jimmie had tumbled the grip-sacks out after him, he continued:

"Well, good-bye, Don, I'll hurry back home and try to catch a little sleep yet to-night. Hope you will have a safe trip. Give my love to Jack's girl and tell her she missed it by not waiting until she had seen me."

"All right, Jimmie, I will tell her just what you say. Good-bye. Don't kill the horses going home."



Jim was soon out of hearing and Don was left alone, to tramp up and down the dimly-lighted platform and to wait patiently, if possible, until his train, due in about twenty minutes, should come along.

Fortunately, the train was on very good time and Don was, sooner than he might have expected, comfortably seated in the smoking apartment of the sleeper, awaiting the making up of his berth by the porter. His mind had been very much relieved since his interview with Dr. Lykin in regard to Minna. "It might take some time," the doctor had said, "to restore Minna's mind to its natural balance, if indeed there was anything the matter with her other than the eccentricities occasioned by the strange life she had led among the gypsies." But in every way he had spoken most hopefully.

Don was completely worn out with the continued excitements he had passed through, so that he slept, with the exception of rare intervals, almost throughout the entire journey to New York.

His mother and Maud wept for very joy at his being restored to them; it was almost pitiful to note his mother—how she could not bear him out of her sight for an instant; how she would follow him from room to room, utterly oblivious of all else save that her boy was once more with her. Maud, too, plied him with questions as to Jack, repeating the same inquiries over and over again, until Don laughingly told her:

"This makes about twenty times that I have said to you, Maud, that Jack is very well indeed; I never saw him looking better. Now if you will just tell me how to put this to you in such an emphatic way that you will be satisfied, I will be only too pleased to do it."

"Now, dearie," replied Maud, "I don't mean to worry



you. Of course I am sure Jack is perfectly well, if you say so ; and you did tell me he is well, didn't you? He hasn't been working too hard, has he? and you do not think he has injured his health seriously, in any way, by going out there on the farm, in such severe weather especially?"

"Now see here, Maud," interrupted Don, "S—— County, Iowa, is just full of the most healthy men on the face of the earth ; there are hundreds of them lying about in every direction who must be three or four hundred years old ; still they are that healthy that they do not look to be over twenty. Now, if you will take the combined health of the whole county and put it into one man, you will know just about how well Jack is."

"Dear, you haven't changed a bit ; go along and tease me all you want to to-day, for I am so happy, I couldn't be angry if I tried."

"Well, girls," went on Don, addressing his mother and Maud both, "I must be going out and attending to some very important and pressing matters."

"You are not going out of the house to-day," they both exclaimed.

"Oh, but I must. Now you understand all about Jack's getting here to-morrow, some time, and about little Nellie Miller being with him. Fix her room up as nicely as you know how, put some flowers in it and one thing and another. Maud knows how to do it, so the child won't get homesick. You will both love her, for she is a sweet little thing and will be great company for Maud while we men are out. Maud is getting to that age, anyhow, when she needs a protégé, or some excuse to keep her in society"—this with a twinkle in his eye.

"Thank you," retorted Maud, "I have all the attention



and court paid me one could wish, and it will be many a long day yet before I am laid on the shelf to be taken down only as needed to chaperon some 'bud.' "

"Oh ! indeed !" interrupted Don.

"But it is all right, brother, I will not vent my spite on Miss Nellie for the fun you keep poking at me ; but of course it will be very hard for her, in starting out, to have such a brilliant contrast as I by her side all the time ; still I will make myself as plain as possible and try to keep in the background."

"Do not concern yourself too much about that, you conceited little girl," said Don ; "I warn you, you will have all you can do in taking care of your laurels. But I am off ; you may expect me in good time for dinner," and Don strode through the hall with a brisk step.

Going out into the street, he hailed a hansom and rode direct to his father's office. To that gentleman's credit, be it said, Mr. Gilbar was so pleased at seeing his son once more that he gave him, for the asking, a check filled in with a big round sum, without inquiring what use Don had for so much money right at once.

Possessed of this powerful ally in accomplishing all ends in the world, Don busied himself until late in the afternoon in preparing for the arrivals expected on the morrow. He had considerable difficulty in finding just what he wanted ; but by a liberal use of his money he secured a lovely suite of rooms, in a convenient part of the city and within easy reach of the Park, so that Minna might have the benefit of what little fresh air there was in the city, together with the privilege of seeing the blue sky.

He also engaged three competent nurses, who were to relieve each other and thus be able to keep a constant watch over their patient, day and night.



Don had at last found something to do, and by the time the day was ended he felt quite like a man of business. Going home to dinner in high spirits, he spent the whole evening with Maud and his mother, giving them a highly colored history of his exploits since he had been away from them, leaving out any reference to Minna, as he feared they could not understand or appreciate the description he would be compelled to give of her at that time.

Maud and Don sang a good part of the evening, their hearts being full of joy. This music was a great pleasure to them. Don's rich tenor voice was so full of winning sympathy that his mother, feeling she had never heard him sing so before, jokingly said to him :

"Don, you sing as if you were in love."

"Well, I am in love with you and Maud," was Don's reply.

At a late hour they retired, to be awakened the following morning by the newsboys crying "*World! Sun! Herald!*" All the morning papers. All about the great railroad accident." At the same time, the household was more thoroughly aroused by a sharp and repeated ringing of the door-bell. A few minutes later, old George knocked at Don's door, and, being admitted, handed young Gilbar one of those little yellow envelopes, which have so often brought joy, and at other times sorrow, to many households.

Telling old George to pay the messenger-boy and sign for the telegram, Don hastily tore open the dispatch, and read—

"WARRENVILLE, N. Y., July 2, 18—.

"DON GILBAR, No. — Fifth Ave., New York.

"Our train in a bad smashup; a number killed; many badly hurt;



our party all badly bruised, but hope for no fatal results. Meet us yourself three-thirty Grand Central.

“JACK.”

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a sultry Summer morning upon which Dr. Lykin impatiently paced up and down the platform of the depot at Pleasantville.

Jim had driven the doctor and Nellie into town early, and while he and Nellie were enjoying each other's company, Jack looked anxiously in all directions for Minna's arrival.

About ten minutes before the train was due, hearing a great clatter of hoofs, Dr. Lykin looked along the dusty road, to see Minna coming at full speed. She was mounted on a superb beast which was covered with foam and dust, its distended nostrils and panting sides proclaiming a sharp, hard ride. As Minna pulled her steed on his haunches, by the side of the platform, she sprang lightly to the ground and taking the bit from his mouth—she had had no saddle—hit the brute a sharp cut with her willow switch, causing him to wheel and dash back along the road. It was a beautiful animal that Minna rode and worthy of a second notice, as was Minna's feat of riding and controlling the high-strung charger as she did, without saddle or bridle; but more important and pressing matters demanded their attention, so that the horse and the ride passed almost instantly out of sight and mind.

“Good-morning, Minna,” accosted Jack, extending his hand, “we have only a few minutes to wait. I have our tickets all right, but where is your baggage? We must attend to that quickly, for there is not much time left.”

“Good-morning, sir,” replied Minna at the same time,



inclining her head with a bright smile to Nellie, her face much flushed with the heat, her hard ride, and possibly the excitement of the moment. Her magnificent hair was partly loosened and almost falling down, but in spite of all she looked beautiful in the extreme. "You will find Minna's trunk somewhere hereabouts, for two stout woodmen fetched it in the night and guarded it well, until daylight made it unnecessary."

"I think that is the lady's trunk," interrupted a man, coming forward, who would have been taken for an official solely because of his cap, which was the regulation railroad headpiece.

"The man speaks well," replied Minna.

So Jack having found the desired baggage, proceeded to secure the balance of his checks, having attended to the transportation of his own and Nellie's baggage before, and a moment later a long shrill whistle heralded the approaching train. It could easily be seen, on their going aboard, that Minna was not used to traveling on the railroad, but the same might be said of little Nellie. So that although Dr. Lykin watched her critically, he was unable, after an hour's ride, to form a more satisfactory conclusion as to the state of her mind than he had at previous times.

The atmosphere was oppressively hot and humid, as the train sped along through the varying landscape. Minna grew distressingly nervous and excited, all efforts to engage her in any connected conversation being fruitless. In time she grew pale, and in a disconnected way indicated that she was suffering from sharp pains in her head and nausea, so that before they had proceeded many miles upon their journey, the young doctor persuaded his patient to lie down in the berth he instructed



the porter to make up ; and then, going back in the car, he opened a small medicine chest and, mixing a soothing draught, he brought it to her.

As he had been absent only a few moments, he was much surprised upon his return to find Minna sleeping quietly ; at the same time his attention was arrested by the strong odor that pervaded the apartment. A moment later he perceived a vial clutched by her delicate fingers. With a mystified look the doctor disengaged her hold upon the vial and, removing the stopper, he moistened his tongue with the potion. Instantly he knew that she had administered to herself a drug so rare and powerful, and at the same time so little in use, that only once before had he come in contact with it. The great wonder was, how had she ever become possessed of such medicine, and how could she know the use of it, or what portion could be taken with safety ? To inhale sufficient to produce sleep so quickly, especially to one in Minna's previous excited condition, was very dangerous ; but as Minna was breathing easily, the doctor introduced as much fresh air as was possible into the apartment and, knowing that it would be a long while before the effect of the drug would naturally pass away, he supplied little Nellie with a quantity of books and papers, together with fruit and nuts, and then returned to patiently and attentively watch for the result. What it would be, he acknowledged to himself, he did not know.

At intervals during the day they stopped to supply the engine with coal and water or, as they reached the termini of the several divisions, to change engines. No doubt the sultry day and the surroundings were conducive to the frame of mind that the young doctor was in ; but, experienced and practical as he was, he thought



how strange it all seemed. They rushed along, apparently through space and without any effort on their part; they were covering miles upon miles of distance. All that was necessary was for him to sit quietly, and in a comparatively short time he would be transported from the wild, thinly inhabited plains into the throbbing heart of the great city. To-day, he had but parted from the relatives and friends of his youth, to-morrow he would be miles away, surrounded by friends of later years and ties that bound him none the less securely because of their newness. He had nothing more to do now but to remain inactive and subject to the will of the man who held his hand firmly on the pulse of the great hissing monster that was drawing him so swiftly and surely into the presence of his darling.

His thoughts of Maud were so soothing that he, too, was soon fast asleep, unmindful of the precious charge that should have demanded his wakeful attention. For several hours he slumbered, and then some irresistible force—which proved to be Minna's big eyes gazing steadfastly at him—caused him to awake.

"A faithful guide never sleeps on the trail," said Minna, in a low sweet voice.

"Well, that is so," acknowledged the doctor, jumping up and rubbing his eyes; "but I thought the path was plain; we had a good driver; the rest of you were so discourteous as to sleep, so I thought I would join you in the 'Land of Nod.' Do you feel better now? Have the pains left your head?"

As Jack became fully awake, he thought he had never seen any one so fascinatingly beautiful as the woman reclining on the berth by his side. Her wonderful hair fell all about her; the big blue eyes seemed to draw his



very heart from within him ; her mobile lips were parted by a sunny smile, telling plainly that all pain had passed away ; and the whole poise and graceful outlines surpassed the strongest imagination.

“ Minna has no pain now ; she left it far behind. Bid little Nellie come here ; Minna needs her.”

“ All right,” said Jack, feeling relieved at the opportunity for leaving such a bewitchingly dangerous being. “ I’ll leave you girls alone awhile and go and have a smoke ; should you need me for anything, send the porter to the smoking apartment.”

From this on, Minna was comparatively contented, although the close confinement of a railroad car was naturally very trying to one so used to perfect freedom as Minna had been all her life. The swift dashing speed of the train, however, pleased her and seemed to buoy up her spirits.

Jack congratulated himself on the prospects of a safe journey and no further cause for trouble or anxiety on his part—something he was by no means sure of when they started.

The doctor and his faithful little assistant did everything in their power to amuse and entertain their fellow-traveler. A few hours were spent in Chicago, and it was with some slight difficulty that they persuaded Minna that it was not their destination. Being the first city she had ever seen, she could not grasp the idea that there were still other and larger cities. To her, there was one country ; *per contra*, there must be but one city.

It was in discussing and trying to explain to her that they had many miles yet to travel before reaching the great city that her lack of mental balance became more apparent to the closely-observing young physician than



at any previous time in his intercourse with her. Finally, though more because of her confidence in them than that she understood why they must go on, she resumed the journey, apparently satisfied.

It was nearing midnight of the second night, with the heat oppressive, almost to suffocation. The few passengers were sleeping more or less uneasily, owing undoubtedly to the intense sultriness. There was not a breath of air stirring naturally; even the rushing train did not create any perceptible current of air, as it cut through the heavy, torrid atmosphere.

Jack had gotten up and dressed himself, as he could not sleep; and going back to the rear of the car, he looked out of the open window into the inky black darkness. At intervals, vivid lightning flashed along the rails, revealing the heavy clouds that seemed to descend to the ground immediately in their path; and the deep thunder could be heard above the rumbling of the train.

"It looks as if we were running right through the clouds," said Jack to himself; "I can imagine we came right out of that heavy black mass yonder. Gad! but that is terribly blinding," as he closed his eyes upon the fierce light that was playing about the train. "Well I wish we would have a good rain, so as to cool it off a little; I have been looking for this for a day or two. How in the world do those people sleep? I am sure——" and then the shrill shriek of the engine was heard above the storm, and the sudden violent setting of the brakes threw Jack flat on his back.

The next instant, he was hurled with great force against the side of the car, as it arose almost perpendicularly in the air and, with a deafening crash, fell upon its side



under a great mass of heavy wood, iron, broken glass and a quantity of other débris. The situation was appalling, but not for a moment did Jack lose the use of any of his faculties. It flashed upon his mind at once that there had been a terrible accident, and as soon as the momentum which had been forcing him along lost its power, he found himself on the hard ground, some little distance from the great shapeless mass of wreckage. Whether he had been thrown through an open window or some other aperture in the now badly broken car he could not tell ; but there he lay, untrammelled.

As he arose to his feet, he found his left arm numb and powerless. This numb feeling quickly gave way to intense pain, and blood trickled down upon his hands from a cut of more or less seriousness ; but it was no time to think of his own wounds.

The hissing steam from the crippled engine, the groans, prayers and curses of the poor mangled creatures still imprisoned in the wreck, or lying helpless by the side of the track, begging for death to come and end their sufferings, or blaspheming at their fate, as the case might be, all demanded immediate action.

To add to the horror of the scene, the storm had broken upon them in all its fury. Peal upon peal of thunder increased the noisy confusion, while the vivid lightning constantly lit up the spectacle with a fiendish glare.

Jack was among the first of those who were yet capable of action to enter upon the task of giving relief to their less fortunate fellow-travelers. He sought everywhere for the two girls who were his especial charge. His progress was very slow, stopping continually to lend a hand to some of the poor creatures, as he found them scattered everywhere among the broken fragments.



The rain came down in torrents, making little pools and lakes all about them. A few who would have escaped with slight injury, as soon as relief reached them, were drowned in the ditch beside the grade, being unable to extricate themselves, unaided, from the trucks and timber that held them imprisoned.

Jack had labored manfully for some time, forgetful of his own pain in trying to relieve the sufferings of those about him. He had just bound up, as best he could, the wounds of a little lad who was terribly cut about the head and had laid him on a broken seat, sheltering him in a degree from the driving rain, when something cold touched his hand and a brave little voice spoke to him.

"Oh! Mr. Jack, I have found you at last!" it said. "Isn't this awful? Can't you come with me to Minna? How did it happen?" meaning the accident. "I did all I could for her, and some big, kind man helped me; but he said she was dead and those who were yet alive needed him."

"Poor little Nellie, is it you indeed?" cried Jack. "Where did you leave Minna? We must go back to her at once."

"Come on, I'll show you the way; it's not far; I have only just left her and found you at once."

"Good God! Nellie, be quick; but what a state you are in, poor child! Are you hurt anywhere?"

Faithful little Nellie was indeed a pitiable-looking object. Clad only in her skirts, which clung about her dripping with water, her long curls hanging in matted strings from which the rain trickled down; barefooted she trotted along, shivering with excitement and cold, as the temperature had fallen rapidly in the last few minutes since the storm began.



“No, I don’t think I am hurt a bit,” chattered Nellie, “but, oh! you are, Mr. Jack; your face is all cut and you are all blood. What can I do for you?”

“It is nothing,” replied Jack, “and there is more of others’ blood than my own that you see on me. Do not fret about me, poor child; only show me where Minna is, if your strength will stand a greater strain than has already been put upon it.”

“Why, here she is, Mr. Jack. Oh, Jack, is she really dead?”

The storm had been of short duration, although fierce while it lasted, and by this time it had passed over and beyond them; the thunder muttered in the distance, as though angry at being forced away by some irresistible power. There were still feeble flashes of lightning, while the rain now fell to only a small degree.

Nellie pointed to someone lying on a slight elevation at their feet, while Jack, seizing a brakeman’s lantern that fortunately lay near them unextinguished, knelt by the side of what proved to be Minna. Placing his ear upon her heart, he was overjoyed to find that it was beating quite distinctly; a hasty examination failed to discover any abrasions upon any part of her body, so that the great hope was that she might not be hurt internally, but only stunned into unconsciousness.

Leaving Nellie alone again with Minna for a few moments, Jack hastily summoned assistance, and procuring some bedding that was more or less scattered about out of the sleepers, they carried the unconscious girl a little distance back from the road, to a comparatively dry spot, where the young doctor applied every device that he could think of to restore her to consciousness, but in vain.



A train had been telegraphed for to carry forward the wounded; but it was some time before it arrived, a wrecking train being on hand much sooner.

It seemed to those who had near and dear friends and relatives among the dead, dying and maimed, that the enterprise of the soulless corporation was more discernible in the expedition used to clear the tracks for future traffic than in caring for the sufferers. In this, possibly, their sympathetic hearts misled them, and no doubt everything was done that was possible in bringing aid quickly.

While standing by the side of a fellow-creature whose life blood was ebbing away from its mangled limbs, the intense pain calling forth heartrending groans that the night air carried for miles across and through the ravines, until the mournful sounds broke against the mountain sides and vanished among the rocks, it was only natural that the time should seem interminable before the assistance arrived which might save a life, or at least to a great degree lessen the awful suffering.

It was nearly daylight before the special train was ready to start with its precious freight. Although Jack's left arm was broken and his face badly cut in several places, he had worked continually, giving valuable assistance to the corps of physicians who had come down on the train, in amputating and setting broken limbs, stitching up ugly gashes and all the work attendant upon such a terrible catastrophe, refusing all offers of assistance in his own behalf until the train started and everything had been done that could be done for the other passengers.

Just before leaving the scene of the disaster, by the aid of restoratives in the cases of the attending physicians, Minna had opened her wondrous eyes, but only to stare



vacantly about her and sink again into a comatose condition.

A fierce fever had set in, flushing her face to a scarlet hue, and her pulse rose rapidly.

Jack feared the worst.

The first opportunity that presented itself, Jack telegraphed to Don, saying that the young man should meet them in person, because he would need his assistance upon reaching New York City and the only objection to Don's presence was removed, as there was not the slightest danger of Minna's recognizing anyone, if indeed the poor girl was alive by the time they reached their destination. They left the most of their fellow sufferers in Buffalo, taking the regular express from there to New York.

It was of little use to inquire or try to explain the cause of the accident. The air-brakes on the passenger train that had been demolished had become useless early in the evening, so the train was running under orders to go through using the hand-brakes. This caused them to lose more or less time at each stop. This time they were trying to make up by an especial burst of speed, so that the train was running at the rate of sixty miles an hour when they crashed into a freight train ahead of them. The freight had been parted on a heavy grade, as the engine attached to it, although very powerful, was unable to pull the whole train up at one time. The rear end was standing motionless on the track, while the flagman had gone back a sufficient distance to stop the not unexpected express, had the air-brakes been working. Their being useless, however, could not have been anticipated by the freight flagman: hence the accident.

That was all; but that "all" meant the ending of more than one vigorous life with a bright future; it meant to



others the ending of their days in such a sad, maimed condition, that those who had been killed might have been regarded the more fortunate ; others must suffer for weeks or months, at best, while to others yet, who escaped unharmed in body, it meant a scar that never could be removed from their loving hearts, in that they had been bereft of those who were so dear to them.

At 3 : 30 in the afternoon, on time, the Buffalo Express rolled into the depot at New York City. Jack was the first to step from the train, and as he did so, his eyes lighted almost instantly upon Don's anxious face.

"Great God ! Jack, how thankful I am to see you," said Don, as he ran up to him. "I do not know how I have ever gotten through this day of anxiety. Tell me, is she dead or maimed ? Where is she ? Did you leave her and come on alone ? Tell me the worst ; I cannot stand it longer."

"Well, Don, I will not deceive you or build up any false hopes in your breast ; Minna, for I know you mean her, is not dead, and she is here with us aboard the train. I have very little hope, especially as we have been unable to decide up to now just how or where she is hurt ; but she is unconscious and has been so nearly all the time. We can't talk more just now ; the train is about emptied ; so calm yourself and be a man. We will bring her out front on a stretcher, which I have with me in the baggage-car. A short way back I telegraphed for an ambulance, as I forgot to mention that in my message to you.

"Now go on and see if the ambulance is waiting, and I will depend on you to decide where we will take her. It is necessary that she be taken where she will have perfect quiet." And then Jack turned on his heel and walked off.



A few minutes later, they carried Minna out into the street, while the police kept a passage open for them through the crowd which had gathered, it having become known in some way that some of the victims of the great railroad accident would arrive on the Buffalo Express.

Carefully they laid her in the van, and, after Don had greeted little Nellie kindly, he called a carriage for her, Jack and himself, instructing the driver of the ambulance to follow them. They drove slowly across the city to the apartments Don had provided.

The rooms were all that Jack, as a physician, could wish for, being quiet and airy. Dr. Lykin at once summoned one of the best physicians in the city to consult with him. The careful nurses had done their part in preparing and putting Minna to bed; her long hair, brushed out and arranged in two long shining plaits, lay along the snowy pillows, while the flush had gone from her face, leaving it an ashy paleness.

Jack hastily explained to Dr. Bristoe, the consulting physician, all the circumstances attending the case, together with a careful recital of the varied conditions and changes during the day. They spent an hour making a thorough examination and a minute diagnosis of the case, at the end of which time they decided on the course they would pursue, being, in their judgment, the only hope of saving the beautiful girl's life.

As Dr. Bristoe had become very much interested, he proposed to remain during the night, giving Dr. Lykin an opportunity to get some rest, which was imperative after all he had gone through, added to the pain he was suffering from his wounds.

So Jack and Nellie drove to the Gilbar mansion, while Don remained; he could not be persuaded to leave, and



as their coming would receive more or less notoriety through the papers, it was decided that Jack should tell Maud and her mother all in regard to Minna, even to the circumstances of Don's meeting with her and everything he knew, whether from what had been told him or his own observation.

This would be decidedly the best, as it would take away all the mystery, whatever the future had in store for them—should Minna die, or by any chance live.



## CHAPTER XI.

JUST before Jack left the depot, he had written briefly to Maud and sent the note by special messenger, apprising her of their arrival and stating that he would be unavoidably occupied for a time, with some passengers who were hurt in the wreck and had come on with them ; but at the earliest possible moment his duties would permit he would come at once to see her, and that she might expect him and Nellie in time for dinner.

So Maud was at the window, watching, when they finally drove up to the door, and, a moment later, the faithful old footman ushered them in. Maud's face beamed with joy as she rushed up to Jack, who could only embrace her with one arm ; however, he executed that happy privilege very creditably.

"You poor, dear, old, battered-up darling ! How grateful I am to see you alive. We have been worried sick since reading an account of the accident in the papers and receiving your vague telegram. How much are you hurt, Jack ? Is your hand cut, too ? or what is the matter with it ?"

"Arm broken, sweetheart, that is all," replied Jack.

"Broken ? and look how your face is all cut up ! Oh ! you look terrible," and the tears began to show in Maud's bright eyes, so that Jack, thinking to reassure her more quickly by turning her thoughts into another channel than he could by assuming that his wounds were trifling ; besides feeling that some notice should be taken of little



Nellie, as it was very embarrassing to the child to stand there and not receive some recognition, without inviting further comment upon his own condition, turned, and taking Nellie by the hand, said :

“Here, Maud, do not let us be so rude or selfish. This is Miss Nellie Miller, who has come all the way from Iowa to see you, and I am sure you will love her very much, for she is a good, dear little lady, and worthy of all the affection that can be bestowed upon her. Miss Gilbar, Nellie.”

“I am ever so glad you have come, Nellie. Dr. Lykin and Don have written so much about you that I feel I know you already. You must excuse us for being so thoughtless. When you fall in love and have a big lover of a man whom you haven’t seen for ages, especially if he should frighten you with dispatches that might mean the worst ; and then follow them by looking such an object of pity as this one does, you will understand how to pardon us, if you cannot do so now. Come, give me a good kiss and let us see if we cannot be like sisters to each other.”

Nellie was at once put at ease by this, and entirely won by Maud’s kindly salutation. The nurses who were to care for Minna had tidied her up, so that she looked very sweet and pretty, as she replied :

“You have nothing to excuse yourselves for, Miss Gilbar ; we all think Dr. Lykin is the best and nicest man in Iowa, and I am sure I do not wonder now that he fell in love with you ; nor do I believe what old Mrs. Vance said, that there are ‘plenty of young ladies in S—— County that would make Dr. Lykin a better wife than she knew that city girl would.’ You mustn’t mind what Marm Vance says ; we all know her.” This from



Nellie created a hearty laugh as Maud interrupted her with :

“ I am afraid you are a little flatterer, and if you are going to think my Jack is so wonderful, I shall be very jealous. I thought it would be a dangerous experiment to allow him to travel so long with such a fascinating young lady, even though he never let me know that she had such a high regard for him, which has made my risk all the greater.”

“ Now I know you are only making fun of me,” put in Nellie. “ Dr. Lykin and I are excellent friends. I began liking him when he used to make me willow whistles at times when he came over to see papa about cattle deals, and of course I like him just as much yet ; but I don’t think he is anything compared to Mr. Don, your brother. Oh ! he is—— I can’t think of anything that will express enough when I try to describe Mr. Don.”

“ Oh, ho !” said Maud, “ so the wind blows in that quarter.”

“ See, Maud, if you get to worrying about any of the young ladies being impressed with me, all you have to do is to bring Don forward, and he will divert their attention very quickly,” laughingly interrupted Jack ; “ but here comes Mrs. Gilbar,” as that lady entered the room.

“ How do you do, Mrs. Gilbar ? I am very sorry that I must present myself in such a battered condition, but ‘ accidents will happen,’ and I feel very thankful that I am able to present myself at all.”

“ And so are we all very thankful to see you,” replied Mrs. Gilbar, “ for we have been much concerned about you all day ; I suppose this is Nellie ?” without waiting for the formality of an introduction, and as she gave her a motherly caress she continued, “ You are very welcome



to our house and I hope you will make yourself perfectly at home ; try to be just as contented and happy as you can. No doubt you are very tired, so if you wish, Maud will go with you to your room."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Gilbar, I know I shall be happy here ; you are all so kind. I am very tired, and, if you will excuse me, I should like to rest a while."

"Indeed you must be. Go with her, Maud," continued Mrs. Gilbar, "I will entertain Jack, somehow, for a little while."

So Maud started off with Nellie, explaining to her, "We got you the best maid we could find. I hope you will like her."

Nellie was growing a little confused when Maud began talking about her maid, but following out a line of policy decided upon before leaving home, she made no reply, trusting to understand the matter more fully later on.

"These are your rooms, Nellie. We cannot offer you much of a view from the window ; but see, here is a cozy little nook in the adjoining room, which shall be entirely yours, too. I have selected a few books which may interest you, and laid out one of my wrappers, thinking your baggage might not arrive for several days, if, in fact, you did not lose everything in the wreck. I will call Eugenie," touching the bell, "she will come right away and then I will leave you. And, dear, if you are tired, as I know you are, you need not dress again, nor come down to dinner ; we will excuse you this evening."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Gilbar."

"No, say Maud. Please do not let us be formal, in any way."

"Well then, Maud ; I, too, like that better. You are so thoughtful and good to me, and if it is not necessary



for me to come downstairs again this evening, I should be so glad to rest right here. I have hardly slept since we left home, and my head aches terribly."

"Indeed it must, poor child," said Maud. "No, you stay right here and I will send you up a nice little lunch, and if you get a good night's sleep, you will be as bright as a new dollar in the morning. Come in," answering a knock at the door. "Ah, here is Eugenie; Eugenie, this is your little mistress. I feel your service will be light and pleasant with her."

"Comment vous portez-vous? Mademoiselle," responded Eugenie, courtesying.

"I hope you will try to anticipate her wishes."

"Oui, Mademoiselle."

Then turning again to Nellie, Maud kissed her. "Now I will leave you to Eugenie's care; but I will run up and see how you are getting on, after a while; do not hesitate to send for me, if you want anything. Now try not to be homesick, and please do not cry yourself to sleep and spoil your pretty eyes."

"Good-night, Maud," murmured Nellie. "You have spent more time with me now than I deserve; so don't try to come up again to-night. Mr. Jack needs you, and I am sure as soon as I eat a little and drink a cup of tea, I shall go right to sleep. Eugenie will attend to me nicely, I can tell by her good face; so do not worry a minute about me. I promise I sha'n't be homesick to-night, anyhow."

"Well, then, I am off, and as I know you are so sleepy, I will not disturb you again until to-morrow, unless you send for me."

"As Maud started through the doorway, Nellie called her back, with:



"If Mr. Don comes in, say good-night to him for me."

"All right," agreed Maud; "you go to sleep, you little rogue," pinching her cheeks, "and don't bother your head about the boys to-night."

"I wonder if the dear little thing has fallen in love with Don? It's no wonder, big handsome fellow; but pshaw! that is foolishness. The first thing that comes into my head, nowadays, is that everybody is in love with everybody else." Maud said this to herself, as she tripped lightly through the halls and downstairs.

Meanwhile, Eugenie was making Nellie comfortable, and the tired little lady presented a most winning picture, lying on a low divan before the open grate, in which a little fire had been started to take off the damp chill that pervaded the rooms after the storm which had passed over the city,—enrobed in Maud's pale blue wrapper, her long bright curls brushed back from her sweet face.

Nellie had very quickly taken in the situation as to why they had provided her with a maid and to what use the valuable assistant should be put, and although accustomed to attending to her own toilet, entirely alone, she was very thankful to-night for someone in whose hands she could place herself, and thus be free from any exertion whatever.

Eugenie was an exceptionally good attendant, fortunately, and she loved Nellie at once, so that she exerted herself most tenderly in the tired child's behalf.

In time a tempting little lunch was sent up, and after partaking of a goodly portion, Nellie said:

"Eugenie, I think I will go to bed."

"*Très-bon, Mademoiselle. J'ai éventer les draps, tout est prêt,*" and soon Nellie was tucked away comfortably in her soft bed.



"Thank you, Eugenie; good-night," and the next moment her gentle breathing told that she was enjoying the much needed sleep.

"If I didn't feel so much like crying, I would laugh, Jack. You look as though you had been on a terrible jamboree; you are nothing like as handsome as you were, and that's pretty hard on you; but you know, dear, I am just as sorry for you as I can be." This came from Maud.

"Oh, I know all about it. You are just running over with delight at my condition, because you think I will be compelled to stay in with you for a time, you heartless little witch, only you are ashamed to come right out and say so. Well, I acknowledge that it is a balm to me, when I think that I will have a good excuse for loafing about the house with you for a while."

The dinner was over, and Maud and Jack were at last left to themselves. Jack was comfortably fixed in a large easy-chair, while Maud sat on an ottoman, at his feet, with her arm resting on his knee, her animated face looking up into his.

"Now, what about Don?" inquired Maud. "I know there is some reason for his absence to-night; then, I feel sure he has not told us the most important parts of his adventures in the West; besides, something tells me there is more to Nellie Miller's coming than just because you and Don think her such a good child and wish us to entertain her. Indeed, Jack, I think I should know all about it."

"Well, darling, I think, too, you ought to know all about it; so if you will keep right still, I will tell you all that I know."

"Of course I will keep still. The idea!" retorted



Maud, "you are always telling me to keep still. I never say a word; you do all the talking."

"Well, that is all right. If you will just listen, I will tell you about Don."

"Well, am I not listening?" again interrupted Maud. "I do think you can be so unkind when you try. Any stranger, to hear you, would think I never let you tell me anything, and couldn't sit still and listen; or else you do not want to tell me what I want to know about Don; so you take this plan to exasperate me."

"Maud, if you don't keep quiet," said Jack, "I will call old George in and we will get something and gag you. I have an awful lot to tell you and I just will tell you."

"Oh, well, if you are going to threaten me," retorted Maud, "there is no use of my saying anything more." And with a sweet little smile she nestled closer to her lover and with rapt attention listened to what Jack had to say.

"You know, Maud, all about the great storm and how we came to leave Don in the woods that night; also Don has told you that he spent the long Winter in a cave that must be somewhere near father's. How he reached the cave that awful night, none of us know, for Don does not know himself; he can remember that he started after the team, in an aimless way; he knows that he almost perished with the intense cold, and then for a time, he says he cannot tell for how long a time—whether it was hours, or weeks—he does not know what occurred; but when he returned to consciousness, he found himself in a cave, the beauties of which I suppose he has described to you better than I could!"

"Oh, yes," broke in Maud, "he has told me about it; and wasn't it wonderful, Jack? I could never imagine



anything so strikingly gorgeous as what Don described. But how in the world, darling, could he live there all Winter? Where did he get anything to eat? that is what I can't understand."

"That is just it," replied Jack. "When Don first told me about it, there were so many necessary features in the case unaccounted for, that I confess I could not credit his tale; but in the light of subsequent events, I begin to believe his story is all true and that it cannot be called even highly colored. Now, you see, Don does not even know where this cave is, any more. He evidently just fell into it the night he was groping about in the snow, and the day he gained his freedom his delight was so great that it drove all other thoughts for the time from his mind; so that he attached no importance to even attempting to leave a trail which could be followed back to his remarkable subterranean home.

But now this is the important part, which I wish to supply and which will make plain to you, as it did to me, a great many things in connection with Don's adventure. When he came to himself, in the cave, he was not alone, but found himself in the company of a most beautiful woman, and this girl, it seems, provided sustenance for them both, and nursed Don back to health and strength from what, I have no doubt, was a tedious illness."

Maud was sitting up very straight now, with her eyes wide open.

"Jack, that is very strange," she said. "You don't mean to tell me that some girl went into a cave, all alone, with a man—with Don—and took care of him? Who was she? why did she not bring other aid? Pshaw! I don't believe it; it doesn't sound like Don to put up with such a thing, even if there are girls bold enough to do it.



He has just been putting you off, Jack, with some fairy tale and we are not getting at the bottom of this yet."

"But, Maud," continued Jack, "I believe it now, for I have seen the young lady——"

"Young lady—*lady* did you say?" interrupted Maud.

"Yes, lady, and I came on to New York with her."

"Jack Lykin, I am ashamed of you," said Maud fiercely. "You might at least have thought of me, and that I expected soon to be your wife, before doing anything so questionable."

"There now, Maud, hold on; you women are so quick to judge your sex, and in this instance, as is so often the case, you do not know a thing of what you are talking about."

Here, again, Maud broke out with, "Well, I guess I know—anybody would know."

"Indeed, you do not know. Maud, do please keep still; I am really very much in earnest and do not want you to say another word until I have finished; then, any comments you see fit to make will receive due consideration. I believe this young lady to be as pure and innocent as you are, and can think of no stronger comparison. I haven't a shadow of doubt but that she took care of Don, just as he said she is capable of doing, and did all that he claimed she did. But, darling, the poor creature's mind is affected in some way. Don has fallen violently in love with her, which when you see her, some day, you will not think strange, if you are fortunate enough to ever see her alive."

"Is she dying?" asked Maud, her mind reverting instantly to the railroad accident, while Jack's emphatic, confident words were making their impression on her, and gaining the sympathy from her that was desired.



"I trust not," went on Jack, "but she was very seriously hurt, last night, and it will take some hours yet for us to conjecture the probable result."

"Well, how did she happen to be coming to New York? and why did you not all come together? Why did Don come first?" inquired Maud.

"You see," replied Jack, "it was this way; Minna, for that is her name, is violently in love with Don, or, more properly speaking, madly worships him, as only a being of her wildly romantic nature can.

"Now, do not lose sight of the fact that her brain is affected. After studying her, as I have, the only satisfactory conclusion I can come to is, that some time during her past life, of course we cannot judge when, she has met with some accident, in recovering from which certain tissues of her brain must have unnaturally united, or possibly are lying in an abnormal position. Hence, while in many ways she is as others, yet some of her acts are strange and unseemly.

"Now for some reason which none of us know, after taking care of Don all Winter, she left him one day, intending, probably, to be gone only a short time; and it was while he was thus left all alone that Don accidentally discovered the way out of the cave. After that, some little time elapsed before we got together in the manner Don told you. Well, then, you see, Don didn't say a word to me about Minna until one night about the time I was ready to start on here.

"Then he told me all about her. At the same time, he narrated his little adventure through which he met Nellie Miller. This was the same day of the evening I am talking about. It was on Don's mind, continually, to hunt up Minna, although at that time he supposed that she had



deserted him. Then Nellie told him about coming across some remarkable creature who was dazzlingly beautiful, at the same time queer, describing Minna to a dot. Through Nellie he found out that Minna was wild about him, and was wanting to find him. You remember that Don had been coaxing her all Winter to show him the way out of the cave and come on here to New York with him."

"I don't remember it at all, Jack; you never told me that," interrupted Maud.

"Well, anyhow, that is what he did," continued Jack. "Of course then Minna naturally supposed that as soon as Don escaped, he made right for the city; but, you see, Minna's idea of the city was just about the same as yours is of Heaven. She supposed it was somewhere, but had no idea how to reach it."

"Jack, I have a pretty good idea how to reach Heaven; but of course that is not saying I am going that way," put in Maud.

"Darling, won't you please let me get through with this?" said Jack, impatiently. "I suppose Minna is some kind of a hermitess; from her way of talking, one can almost feel sure she has spent much of her life among the Indians, and as they couldn't give her information of any value in regard to reaching the cities, she came across Nellie, who was returning home with her father from Pleasantville, about a week before Nellie met Don. She proposed to Nellie that they two should make the journey East together. Nellie, like any child of her age, was right in for it; only, when it came to the point of going, Nellie was about as incompetent as the other.

"So it was in asking Don to help them out that she happened to tell him at all about Minna. Well, then, Don was all along bent on getting Minna here, to New



York, for treatment ; so here was his golden opportunity. Minna might not have been willing to come on alone, with me ; but after we arranged for Nellie's coming, it was the most natural thing in the world and in fact just what Minna suggested herself, for Nellie to find them a guide ; so Nellie found me.

"Now then, had Don put in an appearance, we would more than likely have had great difficulty, if indeed it had been at all possible, in getting Minna to leave the Plains. As it was, we had no trouble, for she supposed we were going to find Don, which was the only incentive we could have offered successfully."

"Oh, yes, Jack, I begin to see through it all now," said Maud. "Poor, dear girl ! And do you think her mind will be entirely restored to her ? Is she hurt so very seriously ? What can I do, darling ? Tell me, may I go and nurse her ? Where is she now ?"

"You are a good little soul, when your heart speaks," replied Jack, "and we will see to-morrow what there is to be done. Don has engaged lovely rooms for her, where she will be comparatively quiet. He is there now and I suppose will remain all night. Dr. Bristoe is with her and will also remain to watch the case carefully. I wish I could be there myself, although everything will be done that can be, and it is just about a physical impossibility for me to do more until I gain some rest. They have some trained nurses for Minna, and we can only hope for the best. Now you would better tell your mother all I have been telling you. And really, darling, I have been keeping up only by a great effort the last hour, and much as I dislike to leave you, I must go to my hotel and to bed, or I will have a fever the next thing."



"Yes, go, Jack, right away. How I wish we were so situated that I could help you and take care of you to-night!" Maud said this with a little blush. "I won't ask you to come too early to-morrow; sleep just as late as you can in the morning. Only mind, do not go anywhere else before you come here."

"I won't," promised Jack, "and I do not fear but that I will be feeling pretty comfortable to-morrow. Good-night, darling. I hope you will sleep well and that all this excitement won't prove too much for you."

"Good-night, dear," murmured Maud, as she stood on tiptoe and gave him a long, fervent kiss.



## CHAPTER XII.

WHAT a long, dreary night it had been ! Dr. Bristoe migrated from the sick room to Don, and back again. There seemed to be no suffering in Minna's gentle breathing ; but for the even regular swelling and sinking of her lovely bosom, she would have appeared as dead to those watching so intently. But now the night watch was drawing to an end ; the milk wagons, the first harbingers of day in the great cities, were heard rattling over the stony streets.

"Will there not be a change of some kind, doctor, soon, at daybreak?" said Don, as the great physician sat down by his side.

The doctor was drying the superfluous coffee from his handsome beard, having just partaken of a strong cup of his favorite beverage. Then, lighting a cigar, he replied :

"Can't tell much about it, Mr. Gilbar ; the poor girl may remain in her present carus condition for several days, or she may awaken at any time ; can't say, Mr. Gilbar, can't say."

"Well, but you must have some idea," urged Don, impatiently. "Why do you not say that her life is quietly ebbing away ? Why do you try to deceive me ? If you know it, why not tell me that it is not the chill of the morning air that is freezing the very marrow in my bones, but it is the breath of death that is filling the house ? My God ! why did I not die in the snow before I ever



saw her?" and Don bowed his head upon his hands and gave way to his grief without restraint.

The long, inactive vigil, keeping his feelings under control by sheer force of will, had been too much for Don, so that he no longer attempted to hide his sorrow.

"Tut! tut! man, what is all this foolishness? Come now, 'while there is life, there is hope'; and I will tell you, although it is not professional to do so, I believe the girl will live, if we can only keep her quiet. She must have been under a great pressure of excitement before the accident; now her brain and will power seem to be thoroughly inactive, nor does her blood circulate naturally, noticeable by her being so flushed at times and then becoming so pale. Now any sudden jar or noise would be almost sure to send the blood all to her head, or heart, either of which would prove fatal at this juncture; but if we can keep everything perfectly still, until her faculties become animated, there is no reason why she should not recover. The only question is, has she vitality enough to hold all her faculties intact, until they gradually resume their natural functions? and I believe she has.

"Now, then, that is more than I have ever said about any of my patients, and I have had many in a much less critical condition; so if you do not pull yourself together at once and cheer up, I will think you ungrateful and myself an old fool for wasting so much valuable breath."

"How can I thank you, Doctor?" replied Don. "I confess I showed great weakness, but you do not know all she is to me, nor how she saved my life."

"Don't I?" was the doctor's laconic rejoinder.

By this time, although still quite early, the busy hum of the city was beginning to be heard; steam whistles sounded in the distance; and the tramp of the early



bread-winners was carried to the ears of the weary watchers from the pavement below, as they hurried to their various posts of duty.

As the piercing cry of the irrepressible newsboy was wafted on the morning air, Don slipped quietly down to the street and, motioning to an officer only a short distance away, that indispensable guardian of "public safety" came to him, and proffering the distinguished personage a "gold eagle," which the dignity of his office did not prevent his accepting, Don explained that there was a lady at the point of death in the house before which they were standing and respectfully requested that a special officer be detailed to keep the block as quiet as possible, until he could apprise them that it would be no longer necessary.

"Let us have a man of tact and judgment, and we will reward him well; here is my card."

The potency of the retainer already given, coupled with the name of Gilbar, had the desired effect instantly.

"Certainly, sir, we will keep the street as quiet as a grave-yard," the officer eagerly assured Don. "I will try to have myself detailed and would suggest that we put on another man, so that both ends of the block may be guarded."

"Do so," replied Don, "I leave the matter entirely with you. Attend to your duty well, and you may be sure of a generous reward."

Feeling that he had taken all the precautions that he could for the present, Don stepped back into the house.

By this time it had grown quite light, and Don sat down to wait impatiently for some change, which he felt must come with the day. The doctor, too, evidently was antici-



pating something, for he kept in close attendance upon his patient. Don could hear that there were at least two, possibly all three, of the nurses in the adjoining room with the doctor. Their muffled movements, the slight but distinct creaking of the furniture at times, all denoted that some change was going on. In about an hour (it seemed much longer than that to Don) Dr. Bristoe again came to him.

“Well?” said Don.

“I have changed her position entirely, to one that I think will be better now,” replied the doctor; “I also have administered a potion that Dr. Lykin and I decided upon last evening, in case it was necessary. It will be about an hour before we can have the full effect, so there can be no change much before that time, and you would better go out, Mr. Gilbar. Get a breath of fresh air, and take something for your stomach’s sake, both solid and liquid; be your own judge as to what it shall be.”

“But, Doctor——” began Don.

“There are no ‘buts’ about it,” said the physician; “you are not a bit of use here. I am going to catch a little sleep, so there will be no one for you to talk to, and I assure you no change can occur in our patient in less than forty or fifty minutes, anyhow. Now not another word; I don’t want to be bothered.” And the old doctor stretched himself upon a broad, low sofa in the room, and seemed to be asleep instantly.

Partly because he thought it would occupy his mind for a short time and thus lessen the suspense, and partly because he felt that he would need sustenance before the day was over, Don put on his hat and followed the doctor’s advice.

It was yet early when Dr. Lykin ran up the steps of



the house in which Minna lay, her life suspended by a slender thread. Jack was feeling much better than he expected to; he had rested very well all night. Only a small ligament in his arm had been broken, and while of course it pained him somewhat, it did not amount to much for a strong man. His face, too, was rather stiff and sore, making it somewhat difficult for him to eat his breakfast; but these cuts on his face were also slight; and, taking it all in all, he expressed himself as feeling, "tip top." Jack had stopped a few moments at No. — Fifth Avenue, to tell Maud how well he was feeling and to inquire how she and Nellie had passed the night.

"Oh, I didn't sleep much," Maud had said. "Seeing you again, darling, and everything made me restless, I guess. I have a little headache, but think it will soon pass away. Nellie, dear child, is still asleep and I don't think I will disturb her."

"No, let the poor little thing have a good rest," Jack advised.

"You will let me know what has been the result as soon as you have seen Dr. Bristoe, won't you, Jack?" continued Maud.

"Yes; I will send you word at once," Jack assured her, "and I must be going right along now, darling, for I am anxious."

"So am I anxious," said Maud, "and I won't keep you a minute longer."

Then they said good-bye, and the young doctor hurried away.

When Jack passed into the outer room, where Dr. Bristoe was sleeping, he did not stop to awaken the physician, but walked quietly on into Minna's presence. His quick, practical eye told him instantly that all was



going well. Turning to the nurse, who was sitting by the bedside, he plied her with a few rapidly whispered inquiries. Her low answers were apparently entirely satisfactory to the young doctor. He then turned out the lights that were still burning, and, going to the windows, noiselessly threw wide open the blinds; as the room was filled with the broad light of day, Jack again turned to the bedside, and scanning Minna's features closely for a few moments, he spoke to the nurse hurriedly. "Go into the next room and arouse Dr. Bristoe; tell him to come here instantly." In a very few minutes Dr. Bristoe was by his side.

"See," said Jack to him, "the reaction has set in at last; she is regaining consciousness. Look how her eyelids quiver, her lips are parting; note the nostrils, how distended they are; and her breathing is becoming labored. Now, now, Doctor, look!"

The feeble rays of the morning sun were just breaking through the mist and smoke; one bright line of light fell across the bed, as Minna slowly opened her wondrous blue eyes, while a faint smile parted the thin lips.

The two physicians held their breath.

The least word spoken, or hasty movement, might startle her and the effect prove fatal.

The color was coming into her cheeks; a rosy tint was spreading from her temples down to her beautiful throat and neck: the eyes were getting brighter and seemed to be shining with intelligence and reason. Presently she attempted to move uneasily and turn her face towards the light; then, in a low, calm voice, she murmured:

"Where am I? Is papa here?"

"Thank God," burst from Dr. Lykin's lips as he turned his head away, overpowered with thankfulness.



This was not the voice with which he had always heard Minna speak ; it was weak and low, but instantly, Jack, who was familiar with her immediate past, felt that there had been a change, and that it was a perfectly rational mind that was directing the scattered thoughts and few spoken words.

Dr. Bristoe answered Minna :

“ You are at home, child, and papa will come presently. He has grown tired watching over you, for you have been very sick ; but you are all right now and will soon be about, as usual. Papa said when you awakened, we should give you this little nourishment and then you must go to sleep again.”

“ Dear papa ! But this doesn't look like home,” began Minna.

“ There, now,” remonstrated the doctor, “ you mustn't talk another bit. Come, come, drink this ; it will do you good ; then to-morrow you can talk all day, if you feel like it.”

The kindly old doctor gently supported Minna's lovely head as he offered her a well-filled glass from which she drank obediently.

“ There now, that's a good girl ! Do not worry your head about anything, but sleep all you can.”

For some time Minna lay there, looking about her in a troubled, mystified way ; but she did not seem inclined to talk further. During the entire day she remained quiet, dozing at intervals.

After administering the draught, Dr. Bristoe had called one of the nurses to the bedside and then retired to the other room with Dr. Lykin. They found Don quietly waiting for them, and to his inquiry as to the status of the case, Dr. Bristoe emphatically announced :



"There is no reason, Mr. Gilbar, why the young lady shouldn't recover very rapidly."

"Has she regained consciousness? has she spoken?" queried Don, excitedly.

"Hush," said Jack, "don't you know any better than to talk so loud. Everything depends on keeping her quiet, and unless you can control yourself, you would better go away. Minna has both regained consciousness and spoken, and, as Dr. Bristoe says, if we are only careful and do not startle her in any way, we will have her all right and out in a few days."

"I suppose you can't tell how soon I may see her?" asked Don, speaking this time hardly above a whisper.

"No, we cannot tell that," replied Jack, "but I do not think it will be very long. And Don, old man, I believe as soon as she is up and gains a little strength her mind will be perfectly clear and rational—don't you, Doctor?" turning to his senior.

"Certainly it will; it is just about as you said, Lykin; some of the tissues of her brain have been in an abnormal condition, or some sulcus may have been clotted with blood. Something of that kind has impaired her intellect, numbing the delicate intuition of which she should have been possessed, while in other respects her mind may have been as clear and bright as anyone's, or even unusually developed.

"Now I believe the shock that she passed through, very likely coming in contact with some obstruction in a forcible manner, has removed this cause, whatever it has been. Certainly I might be able to offer a more tangible solution of the whole matter had I seen the patient before; now all I find from personal observation is a magnificently developed woman recovering from a severe shock



and suspended animation, who, upon regaining consciousness, has the light of perfect reason shining from her eyes ; so that it is very difficult for me to explain an affliction that I do not find."

To all this Don listened with rapt attention. That his fond hopes were very possibly to be realized, and that so soon, was almost too good to be true.

"Now I tell you, Don," continued Jack, "you may as well go home and tell Maud of the bright prospects. I should talk to her freely. You will find that she will be in accord with your feelings and offer you ready aid and sympathy for the future."

"Then you have told her everything?" inquired Don. "How did she take it? Did she seem to understand and appreciate Minna's situation?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Jack, "for I told her hastily all I could about your meeting and our several relations to Minna, and last night, as well as this morning, there seemed to be nothing in her head or heart but pity for the poor girl and a desire to do all she could for her."

"Maud is a trump!" ejaculated Don. "She always would do anything in the world for me, and she is safe enough to stick to me now."

"Yes, that's it," said Jack; "so let me take charge here to-day, and you go and entertain the girls; take a ride with Nellie and Maud in the park this afternoon; show Nellie around a little. Do not overlook the fact that the child has done you an inestimable favor. Her assistance we might say has largely been rendered unwittingly; at the same time we might never have gotten Minna here to New York had it not been for Nellie." Right here Dr. Bristoe interrupted Jack with:

"Gentlemen, I think my services can be dispensed with



now, and as you know I have a large practice and duties which are imperative calling me elsewhere, you will excuse me, I know.

“If the case should take a change that we do not now anticipate and I can be of any further assistance to you, Dr. Lykin, just send for me and I will respond as promptly as possible ; but I really think there will be very little needed now, save perfect quiet and careful nursing ; and pardon me for saying that even should new complications arise, I believe you to be abundantly able to cope with them ; so I bid you good-morning, gentlemen.”

“Thanks, Doctor,” replied Jack ; “you are very complimentary. I also personally appreciate your close and careful attention to our patient, especially as I believe you do not regard it as having been a very serious case after all. If I can be of the slightest service to you at any time, I shall take it as an honor if you will call on me. Good-bye, sir,” grasping him by the hand.

“Good-bye, Doctor,” said Don, stepping up. “Send me your bill ; and I cannot think of words that would be adequate to express my heartfelt thanks for the great services you have rendered.”

“Do not be concerned about my charges, Mr. Gilbar,” laughed the doctor ; “they will come in good time, and I am sure I wish you every success and happiness.” In another moment the doctor was gone.

“You are going to remain here, are you not, Jack ?” asked Don.

“Certainly I am,” responded Dr. Lykin. “I think I shall arrange to sleep here for a few days. Of course we cannot tell yet how this is all going to turn out, nor just what Minna will do, nor how she will act as she regains her strength. But you go home and occupy your mind as



best you can. I will keep you posted as to every change that may occur, and should Minna ask for you and we think it advisable, we will send for you."

"All right, Jack, I suppose there is no use of my staying here, and my mind will rest easy because I know Minna is in such good hands ; so I will get home and try to help the girls have a good time, for I feel pretty good myself at the way everything seems to be turning out."

"That's it, Don ; go right along. Tell Maud I shall try to see her a little while this evening and then can bring you word of how Minna has passed the day."

In a week's time Minna seemed to have recovered entirely. She was in the best of spirits and apparently accepted her surroundings as a matter of course. After the first day or two she made no inquiry of any kind as to how she happened to be living in her magnificent apartments. All her past life seemed to be entirely obliterated from her mind. Dr. Lykin repeatedly inquired as to who her parents were, but she seemed to know absolutely nothing prior to the few days since she had recovered. Finally, as she seemed to be thoroughly well, Jack thought that he would startle her into some recollection, or, if possibly she was assuming this indifference to the past, he might, by taking her unawares, catch her off her guard. They had just returned from a short walk. Minna was looking the very picture of magnificent health.

"Miss Queen—" began Jack. They were calling her "Miss Queen" almost entirely now. This came about by one of the nurses asking Don the day he engaged her what was the name of the lady he was expecting, and Don, hardly knowing what to answer, had said, "She is



a queen and must have the best of everything ;” so the girl, supposing that Queen was some great family name, told the other nurses it was Miss Queen, and they were all rapidly falling into the habit of so addressing her.

“Minna, I met an old friend of yours to-day—young Gilbar. He told me all about your caring for him last Winter in the cave out in Iowa, and how kind you were to him. He is very anxious to redeem his promise to you, if you would only come to New York. Now you are here, he wishes to see you at once—to-day.”

The expression of Minna’s face never changed while Jack was talking, and as he paused for her reply, she said, in the most indifferent way :

“Doctor, I am sure I do not know what you are talking about. What cave? Where is Iowa? and who is this Gilboy, or what is his name?”

“Oh, come now, Miss Queen, do not hesitate to talk to me. Have I not done all in my power to prove myself a true friend to you? Besides, this Mr. Gilbar is one of my best friends, and a capital fellow. His sister and I are expecting to be married in the fall. See how I make a confidant of you.

“Now tell me all about why you left your ‘Sun’ as you called him, when little Nellie and I saw you on the plains. “You asked me to help you find him; now I have done so, why do you feign ignorance?”

Minna only shook her head and began to look troubled.

“You really hurt me by such unkindness, and if you persist in acting so, then I am done with you, and you may work out your own salvation. That is all I have to say and I mean it.”

Having apparently relieved himself, Jack stretched out his long, ungainly legs, placed the tips of his fingers



together, holding them about a foot from his face, and assumed as angered an expression as it was possible for the good-natured fellow to do.

Minna was visibly affected. The beautiful girl sat motionless a moment, then, coming to Jack's side, she knelt pitifully, her upturned eyes filled with unshed tears. At all times it taxed the combined strength of her innumerable hair pins to their utmost to hold the weight of her wonderful tresses, and now, after her walk, removing her hat and sinking with such utter abandon at Jack's feet, the silken masses broke from their confinement and fell down and far out upon the rug, rippling and curling like the fleecy spray and foam upon the seashore. Her delicate, tapering fingers were interlocked over Jack's shoulders and supported lightly the weight of her graceful body.

"Dr. Lykin, do not leave me ; pity me. What could I do without you ? You are my only friend, save the kind attendants who have served me so faithfully. What have I done to anger you ? By my soul, by my heart," placing one lovely hand upon her panting bosom, "I swear it, I do not know of what you are telling me. Bring your friends to me ; I will welcome them with open arms, for I am so lonesome. I shall love your wife always for all you have done for me. Your friends shall be my friends ; but again I say I know nothing of what you have asked me. You I never knew, until here in this room, and the others I never heard of, save from your lips.

"Tell me you will not be angry with me ; tell me you will not turn me out."

"So this is the poor, sick girl, who is in such a critical condition that no one must see her ?" said a rich contralto voice, pitched rather high and laden with anger.

Its owner, Miss Maud Gilbar, had been urging her



lover every day for the past week to take her to see his beautiful patient.

“No,” the young doctor said, “wait. Miss Queen is doing wonderfully well ; but I wish her mind to strengthen.” In a day or two,—to-morrow—Maud and Don both should see her.

And so it had gone on, until Miss Maud’s patience gave out—she had not such a large stock to draw from. So she decided to call on the fair patient on her own responsibility ; and lo ! what a spectacle was presented to her scintillating eyes.

Like a flash the thought rushed through her brain that Jack had been false to her, as well as that he had deceived Don ; and truly, at a glance, appearances were all against Jack.

The name of Gilbar had gained her easy admission to the apartments, as it was Don who employed all the servants ; then, too, there had been nothing mysterious about the actions of any of the inmates of the house, nor had there been any instructions as to who should be admitted.

As the attendant had not noticed Jack and Minna’s return, she had ushered Maud right into their presence, in time to hear the last few pleading words ; although the servant had told Miss Gilbar that Miss Queen was not in, but was expected every minute ; would she “step in and wait ?”

“Oh no,” went on Maud, excitedly, “he need not turn you out on my account, although it is only what those of your ilk deserve. Fie upon you, Dr. Lykin ! that you could ever have been so false and base, so contemptible, revelling in your wantonness, drawing upon the bounties of another by the grossest deceit ! How have you dared to come to me, tainted with the heated breath of your



liaison? My God! why did I ever look upon your hateful face! I scorn you; so I wipe the corruption of this polluted place from my shoes."

Viciously Maud ground her little heels into the meshes of Minna's golden hair, that fell all about her, then turning, she strode from the room in a towering passion.

Stunned by this brief tirade, Jack and Minna had remained motionless, just as Maud found them; but now Jack sprung to his feet to rush after her:

"Stay," cried Minna, clinging to his hand, as he dragged her from the floor. "What is all this, what does it all mean?"

"Wait, Minna, let me go; it is all a mistake. Wait here for me."

"I must go with you," insisted Minna.

"No, stay where you are," and Jack hurled her from him as he sprang out of the door and down the stairs.

As he reached the pavement, Maud was just entering her carriage; pushing the footman aside, Jack grasped Maud's arm, saying:

"Maud, let me explain."

"Do not touch me, sir," retorted Maud, "never insult me by addressing me again. I have a brother who will receive a double explanation."

"But it is all a mistake," urged Jack; "you *must* listen; I will not let you proceed until you hear me."

"Officer," called Maud, to a policeman standing near, "arrest this man; he is annoying me."

"Great God! Maud, and this from you!" cried Jack, as the officer placed his hand upon Jack's shoulder.

"Come with me, sir," the policeman said, as Maud's carriage rapidly disappeared down the street.

"I do not think you understand the matter, my good



man," Jack said, controlling himself by a great effort, and quietly pressing a crisp note into the officer's hand.

"Oh, yes, I do, young fellow," that worthy replied; "that's all right; I wish you better luck next time; sorry I happened to be passing."

Jack's second and calmer thoughts told him it would be useless to jump into a cab and follow Maud: better wait until she had regained her self-possession; so he turned back into the house. Minna was waiting tremblingly for him.

"Now, Doctor, tell me what I have done. What did that angry woman mean?"

"You have done nothing wrong, poor girl. Come, sit down and let me tell you how this horrible mistake was possible, and at the same time, perhaps, I can aid your memory, for I believe you are honest in saying you know nothing of the past."

Jack then told her the whole story; how he first met Don, then Maud; how he loved her and how they became engaged, also about Don's going West and being lost in the storm; how Minna cared for him, and Minna's meeting with Nellie and afterwards with himself; their coming on to New York; the accident and all; only not stating that Don and Minna were supposed to have any especial attachment for each other.

Minna listened to it all, interested in one part equally with another; in one incident no more, no less, than all the rest. When Jack had finished, Minna sat for a time in deep thought, then rousing herself, she began talking first about what was evidently uppermost in her mind.

"Doctor, I am so glad that is all. I will go to your Maud at once and tell her how good you have been to me, how noble you are and how much you love her, and"—



with a merry little laugh—"how you and I do not love each other; that it was far from a lovers' quarrel she saw. I am only sorry we have caused her pain for even a little while. Yes, I must go now."

And the beautiful girl began to dexterously replace her hair, in a great shining coil, upon her head, preparatory to going out.

"No," said Jack, "it would be useless for you to go; for you to see Miss Gilbar now would only bring down insults upon your innocent head, if indeed you gained, perchance, admission to her presence."

"But I would explain it all to her. There is nothing hard to tell. It will make her happy to know the truth. Please let me go?"

"No, no, Minna, I know best. A meeting just now would not do either of you justice. I must settle this matter; I alone can do it."

So Minna gave it up and let Jack fight his own battles.

And then Minna insisted she could remember nothing of the accident, of meeting Jack and Nellie, nor anything of her past life; it had undoubtedly all gone from her.

"Sometimes, Doctor, I can remember the farms and the cattle, the big fields that were filled with flowers; but I must have been a little girl then; and then I keep thinking and thinking how I have all at once grown up, and am here; and I get so bothered, I just stop thinking about it; and so long as you are so good to me, and I have everything, why need I think? It must have been just as you said, Doctor, but I don't remember."

"Well, Minna, it may come to you in time; be assured I will never leave you helpless."



## CHAPTER XIII.

"WHY, Maud, what in the world is the matter? I have been hunting everywhere for you, and now I find you crying as though your heart would break! Are you sick? Does your tooth ache?"

Nellie Miller, transplanted into the heart of the fashionable Gilbar family, had taken root there and flourished and grown until, in a short time, she seemed to be a part of them; and having sought Maud the house over, she found her in the conservatory, crying bitterly: hence her solicitude as to the cause.

"Boo-hoo! boo-hoo! boo-hoo!" was all that came from Maud.

"What is it, Maudie? Let me help you. Tell me what hurts you so."

"Oh, why was I ever born?" sobbed the broken-hearted girl. "If I could only die! Oh, Nellie, may you never be trodden upon as I have been! Oh! oh! oh!"

"Well there, pet, don't cry any more. Come, put its head in Nellie's lap."

And true-hearted little Nellie, with a woman's tact, in a short time had soothed Maud sufficiently so that she could tell her what had been the cause of her bitter weeping.

"Now look here, Maud, I just know you are making a big fuss about nothing. Jack and Minna are all right, I'm sure they are," began Nellie.



“All right!” interrupted Maud, her indignation rising as the scene came back to her anew. “Do you call it all right for a beautiful girl to be lying in the arms of your fiancé, her hair all down her back and you cannot tell the full extent of her dishabille, and she pleading with him not to leave her? Do you call that all right?”

“But it is all in keeping with the way Jack has been acting all the week, and oh, Nellie, I loved him so.”

Here poor Maud broke down again. After this, though, Maud’s pride came to her rescue, and no matter how her heart was bleeding, she gave no outward sign.

Don was told the whole circumstance, and his first impulse was to murder the young doctor. Then, rising above this brute feeling, he sent his agent to pay all bills to date, then close the house and turn the inmates out.

It was a bitter blow to Don, striking at his great love for Minna, as well as his confidence and tender affection for Jack. Undoubtedly he would have rushed into all manner of dissipation, but just at this time Mr. Gilbar, senior, was taken very sick and Don, from carrying instructions given by his father to the office, was soon plunged into the abyss of a massive, surging business.

When aroused and the emergency required, Don had plenty of ability, and his cool head grasped the ever-changing situation in a remarkable manner.

Although a new hand was at the helm of the great financial ship, she swept along as majestically as before.

Don’s heart was clear and cold as flinty ice; he was just in the mood for fearless operations. Soon it was whispered about the Street, “Young Gilbar is a worthy son of his father,” as he conducted a few minor deals that redounded to the credit and profit of his concern.



Then he quietly negotiated loans of large blocks of money in every direction, going beyond his own city as well; he placed as collateral, in addition to the great name of his father, some of the most solid securities they possessed. Thus he was able to borrow an incredible amount.

Acting by his directions, his brokers openly bought a few hundred thousands of various stocks that had no real value nor earning power; but the Gilbars were buying, and there must be something in them. So from all directions, abroad as well as at home, came big orders for the different investments. Naturally, stocks went up. In three days his brokers came to him, urging him to make the turns.

"Sell at once, Mr. Gilbar, this cannot last; there is nothing to these shares only wind. You have worked it well and we can realize a very handsome profit."

"Gentlemen, I believe I am managing this; please follow my instructions and do not annoy me with your advice," was Don's reply; so they went away, shaking their heads.

"Young Gilbar is flushed; he is too young yet. Well, he can lose but a trifle for them; I guess it won't be more than fifty thousand or so; they won't notice that and the young man must learn somehow."

In an hour the stocks in question began to decline; by afternoon there had been a sharp fall, when young Gilbar walked leisurely into his agents' office. They were expecting him and, taking Don eagerly by the arm, told him:

"You are just in time, Mr. Gilbar; we told you it was coming; you mustn't expect too much at once. Your scheme was good enough when you boomed these shares,



but you held on too long. However, there are yet bids being made, and I guess we can come out whole, after all."

"Mr. Mauler, I do not wish to tell you again that I do not ask for your opinions. If you choose to do my bidding, well and good; but please keep your thoughts to yourself, or I must secure another broker.

"Now go at once and buy five thousand shares of Wayneville and Adelfontain Terminal, at 1.01; or if you can bid it up to 1.28, do so. I think Mr. Savoy better bid against you, as I wish to buy at a high figure; do the same with the Cantiway; also Nicholhoy shares."

"God! man, these stocks are not worth the paper they are printed on; we examined them, you know, before we started this thing, and I tell you they won't stand any more. Get out of it, Mr. Gilbar; sell out now and try another tack."

"Will you do as I tell you?" cried Don, his passions rising; he had grown very irritable of late.

By thus going into the market again, they induced a number more to buy, but at the closing on 'Change that day, young Gilbar decided he had reached the end in that direction. The next day, he directed his agents to sell all of his recent purchases. "Do not consult me about price; my orders now are, Sell."

The reaction that had just started the previous day, came upon them now with a rush. The flimsy, and practically worthless, stocks Don had bought were all forced upon the market and sold, it is true, but when they footed up their transactions of the past few days, the accounts showed a loss to the Gilbar house of a net five hundred thousand dollars.

Don took it all smilingly. The old brokers and agents



of the firm came flocking in. True, the loss was not serious at all to people of the Gilbars' wealth ; but it looked so like a deliberate and intentional throwing away of money that they could not understand it.

That night, the bulletins reported two or three small failures, and by the next day the financial sky looked very stormy. Ready money had been invested in worthless stocks, and as the payment of margins was demanded, falling due on other transactions that came up in the regular course of business, there was no money with which to meet them.

Gilt-edge stocks began to decline ; call loans were made, in a few instances at a ruinous rate of interest ; confidence disappeared in every channel ; runs were made on one or two of the weaker banks and they were forced to close their doors ; other large financial institutions, as well as individual speculators, were compelled to raise money at any sacrifice, or go to the wall ; the best stocks, first mortgage bonds, shares that were paying big dividends, all were offered for sale.

All this Don had planned for, and he invested every dollar of the firm's money, and the entire amount of the immense loans he had secured.

He was able to buy at twenty, fifty—even in some cases, seventy—per cent. below what they had sold at in times past.

After a time, the situation resumed its usual balance ; true, hundreds all over the land were ruined ; but, as money began to flow through the regular channels freely once more—the Government came to the assistance of the public, by calling in an issue of bonds and paying out large sums of money—Don was enabled to close out such of his purchases as he did not care to hold, and in



two months' time he had increased the wealth of the Gilbars by millions of dollars.

\* \* \* \* \*

At first Jack had made every effort to gain an audience, both with Maud and Don, and to make the explanation that he felt in his heart would be so easy to make, but they were inflexible and positively refused all communications of any nature.

Nellie Miller pleaded earnestly for her friends and at one time was determined to go to them; but her childish fancy was so taken with Don, that he persuaded her to stay away and insisted that neither Jack's nor Minna's name should be heard in his presence.

This was the state of affairs when, one lovely Sabbath evening, Don strolled into the Park—an unusual thing for him to do; but he was restless and thought to get some fresh air as he smoked his cigar.

Coming to an unoccupied seat, in a secluded spot, he sank down as though feeling there was little left for him to live for. He remarked that there was no one in sight and had almost dozed into unconsciousness, when his attention was arrested by voices, talking earnestly, in a clump of bushes just behind him.

"I do not know you," said unmistakably a woman's voice, with a slight tremor of fear. "Please go away."

"Oh, say now, what yer givin' us? 'Course you know me. Come along; we hain't had no luck since you left us," replied some one in a rough tone. "We allers treated you square. Come along, I say."

"No. Oh, please leave me, or I will call for help."

"Sing out, my beauty, who'll hear ye? You're not so brave as you used ter be, lemme tell you; Mammy's dead, and she told me all about you. I know who ye are,



and can make a speck out o' ye. Come on, damn you : yer gotter come."

Don heard every word, as it was borne on the clear night air. As the last words were spoken, there was a scrambling in the bushes and a muffled cry for help.

With a bound, Don sprang through the trees upon a rough brute, who was dragging a lovely girl away, his big dirty paws over her mouth to suppress her screams. Half a dozen steps brought him to them, and with a powerful, well-directed blow Don felled the villain to the ground.

"What is this? What do you mean, you scoundrel? How dared you even look at this lady against her will? Five years at hard labor would be too light a punishment for your laying your dirty hands on her.

"Has he hurt you, Madam?" Don continued, turning with his most polite bow to the lady. "Great God! it is you, Minna!" he cried, perceiving the instant he looked at her who it was he had rescued.

His thoughts overleaped the immediate past, rushing back and over the time of his sojourn with her during the long Winter months, while the great love he had for her, which had not abated one tittle, caused the warm blood to rush to his face and throbbing temples.

"You seem to know me, sir," Minna replied, with her sweetest smile, "and if this is true, you have the advantage over me; but I thank you so earnestly for coming to my assistance just in time to prevent that dreadful creature from taking me, I know not where. Mere words are such a trifling reward; yet I have no other recompense to offer.

"May I still draw upon your bounty, so far as to ask



that you watch this man until I am a sufficient distance to be safe from his further persecutions? May I?"

"I will see that he does not annoy you further," was all that Don replied.

As he again lifted his hat respectfully, Minna disappeared swiftly along the graveled path.

"How can it be possible," said Don aloud, "for so black a heart to be behind such a fair, innocent face?"

He could not realize that Minna really did not know him, and it cut him to the quick that she should be able to thank him as she would a stranger.

"She is the most beautiful creature living," he went on saying, "and her face and expression seemed as artless and innocent as a child's.

"The world calls Don Gilbar lucky, and there are millions to-night who think it would be the realization of their most extravagant imaginations of happiness to be in his place; and yet Don Gilbar would willingly exchange his wealth, position, everything that he now possesses, for the undivided love of the woman whose affections were stolen from him. Well, such is life.

"I scorn the world, and from this hour there shall be no check upon my powers until I own the earth. I will ruin mankind by the thousands and make them suffer, as a punishment for the treachery and perfidy that must be in every human breast, since I find it in the heart of the world's fairest inhabitant."

While Don had been giving vent to his feelings, he had forgotten that he was not alone; but as he ceased speaking and turned to retrace his steps clubward, his attention was arrested by the vagabond, who was still lying upon the ground.

Don had dealt him a terrible blow, closing entirely one



of his ugly eyes ; but as the man had not spoken a word until then, nor made any movement, Don, for the moment, had overlooked him.

“ See here, young feller, be you one of the Gilbars ? ” asked the man, respectfully enough.

Don only deigned to give him a look, and, as he had no further interest in what became of the man, started on. The wretch immediately crawled into Don's path, and continued :—

“ 'Pears like you're in a big hurry to shake me. Lemme tell yer I have some pretty valerable information about that gal ; know all about her—more'n she nor anybody else does—and I'll sell what I know.”

“ Fellow, are you lying to me ? ” he said sternly. “ Tell me what you have to say quickly and if it amounts to anything you shall be well paid.”

“ Oh, no you don't, pard. Pete Denney don't do business that away. Yours truly sells for cash down, he does, amounts agreed in advance.”

The ruffian's familiarity was galling in the extreme to Don, but some irresistible power caused him to temporize with the man.

“ Well, what do you want ? ”

“ Five thousand,” said Denney promptly.

“ Five thousand dollars ! ” repeated Don. “ That's nonsense. I have nothing like that amount with me and no doubt you can tell me nothing I don't already know. Then, too, I wouldn't give you the money first, so how would you be sure I would give it to you at all after hearing your tale ? ”

“ Oh, that's all right ; I can size a man up pretty well,” replied Denney, “ and I ha'n't afeard you won't stick to a bargain once you have made it. It's all to your advan-



tage any way. You will never miss the money, but I am selling everything I have in the world."

"I have half a mind to see this man again," mused Don audibly.

"Yer better," urged Peter Denney. "I am squarer'n I look. Gimme suthin' to get suthin' to eat and a night's lodgin' and I'll meet yer ter-morrer."

Don, remembering as he did the conversation he had overheard between this man and Minna, was disposed to believe that he knew something of her past life. And what were a few dollars to Don?

"Well, I will give you a chance," he said finally. "Here are five dollars, and if I never see you again, I guess you need the money. However, meet me here at six o'clock to-morrow morning and I will listen to what you have to say.

"After you have finished, if I think you had a right to suppose that your information was of any use to me, I will give you the five thousand dollars; but if not, I will drag you to the East River, yonder, and throw you in, as I would a dog.

"Now, you are right; I am a man who will keep his word; so if you have nothing to tell me, my advice is, do not come here in the morning. Now go your way, and I will wait for you here to-morrow for ten minutes, only, from six o'clock."

"I'll be here, Mr. Gilbar, and earn my money, too."

\* \* \* \* \*

After the first few weeks that marked the time of Jack's futile endeavors to place an explanation before the Gilbars, he was completely nonplussed; they utterly refused to see him or open any of his communications.

Just in proportion as the favors of a family in such high



standing as the Gilbars had raised him to the zenith of popular esteem, so the stigma they had placed upon him, as it became known and spread, was fast plunging him into the deepest abyss, and although possessed, as of yore, of great ability, the bright future of the rising young doctor was fading into obscurity.

But, strange as it may seem, Jack loved Maud just as tenderly as ever ; his affection for Don did not diminish one iota ; in his generous heart there was not a particle of censure for the way in which he was being treated. He knew so well their indomitable pride that he could imagine their feelings and argued that, coupled with his absolute refusal to permit either of them to see Minna, the situation, as presented to Maud by himself and his beautiful companion on that fatal day, was compromising in the extreme. How could he ever straighten matters out ?—that was what occupied his thoughts continually.

It was not conceit, but sublime faith, that enabled him to think only of how Maud must suffer. It never occurred to him but that it would come right in time ; not for an instant did he fear that his darling would forget or cease to love him ; but oh ! how miserable must she be, thinking of him, as she was now doing.

Jack had not even attempted to retain the magnificent apartments young Gilbar had provided, as the agent had told him respectfully what was the relation he judged that Jack and Minna bore to each other, and that he would prefer other tenants. He was above arguing or trying to explain to a stranger ; so they quietly departed, and the doctor secured a pleasant home for Minna with some worthy people he knew, where her sweet nature seemed to grow and develop, like a fragrant lily. She seemed instinctively to adapt herself to the cultured surroundings,



and, while a close observer might have noticed a slight hesitancy at times as to just what were the full requirements of society on certain matters, yet even this soon passed away and any little errors of omission or commission were made so innocently and in such a way that they rendered her all the more winning. "A poet is born, not made"—so is a lady.

Now all this time the elder Mr. Gilbar was having a very serious sick spell; what was at first supposed to be a slight attack, superinduced by overwork, gradually developed into a local affection, causing him much pain and suffering.

As soon as the attending physician discovered the real cause of Mr. Gilbar's trouble, he knew that a surgical operation would be necessary to effect a cure, and this he was not able to perform; hence a surgeon must be called in.

"Then send for Dr. Lykin," the old gentleman said.

As soon as Don heard this, he naturally protested against such a preposterous demand. "Father, you have surely forgotten yourself; it is not to be thought of."

"And why not, I should like to know? Jack Lykin is the only man to whom I would trust such a delicate operation, and as I believe I am slightly interested in the result, why should I not say who shall perform the operation?" asked Mr. Gilbar.

"Dr. Lykin's ability is not questioned, sir," his son replied; "but you are cognizant of the dastardly way he has acted, and it is an insult to your daughter, as well as to myself, for you to even think of his crossing our threshold; there are surely other surgeons who are capable."

"There are not," cried the irascible old gentleman. "I never did believe the half you told me about that matter;



but it was you young people's affairs and I did not meddle ; this is my affair and I will have no interference. I tell you right now, I am master here."

" But, father, think of Maud," remonstrated Don.

" Think of the devil !" cried the old man. " Maud is too prudish for this age and day ; I have no patience with any of you. Damn it, man, supposing young Lykin did want to enjoy himself a little, it wasn't anything so remarkable, and if he had settled down and behaved himself after they were married, which no doubt he would have done, it would have been all that she could have asked. The young fellow outwitted you, Don, that's where it hurts."

" He grossly deceived me," broke in Don, " and exhibited the most low-down treachery. If you permit him to enter this house, I leave it forever. No one can betray my confidence, as Jack Lykin did, and again receive from me a much slighter recognition than his admission to this house would be. No, sir ; make your choice. I have always tried to be a dutiful son, but if you insist on this thoroughly unreasonable demand, I will leave your roof instantly."

" You are a blathering idiot," called out his father, as he rose with difficulty and staggered to the bell-cord, pulling it violently.

The old gentleman was thoroughly aroused ; it took very little to fan his temper into a white heat, and at no time would he brook interference.

Old George appeared quickly, and with a voice shrill with passion, his master instructed him.

" Send at once to Dr. Lykin's office ; tell him Mr. Gilbar, senior, is seriously in need of his professional services and that he is to call to-morrow morning, at nine



o'clock ; tell him this message is from Mr. Gilbar, personally."

Then, turning to Don: "Now, sir, you have heard my orders. Leave me ; I have no strength or inclination to discuss the matter further."

Don left the room without another word, too angry to trust himself to speak. It was from this contention with his father that Don retreated to the Park, where he so unexpectedly met Minna.

After leaving Peter Denney, Don spent the night at his Club, his mind filled with innumerable conflicting thoughts.

About seven o'clock on this same evening, Dr. Lykin, too, was preparing to go out when there came a rap, rap, rap at his office door.

"Well ?" said the doctor.

"Someone to see you, Dr. Lykin," answered the trim little servant, as she opened the door.

"Show him in, Nettie. What, you, good old George !" exclaimed Jack, as he recognized the Gilbar factotum. "To what may I attribute this pleasure ?"

On the instant, Jack felt that George must be the harbinger of some disaster ; nevertheless, the familiar old face was more than welcome.

"Yes, Dr. Lykin, it is old George, and I have a message for you. I was so fearful there might be some mistake if it was intrusted to anyone else that I brought it all the way myself."

"And what is it, George ?" asked Jack, with unmistakable interest. "I hope you have no bad news for me."

"Well, you see," began the old servant, "Mr. Gilbar has been sick for some time, and they found out the last



few days that there is something in his side that has to be cut out; so as soon as they told the master this, he said, 'Dr. Lykin is the only man that can cut into me,' or words to that effect.

"Then, I think (I beg pardon for having an opinion), Mr. Don objected to your being called in; but when the master makes up his mind, St. Peter himself can't change it; so he pulled the bell in a way that anyone who didn't know him would think he was in a bad temper, and when I ran in, he said to me, 'Send word to Dr. Lykin to be here to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock; tell him Mr. Gilbar personally sends for him,' so I sends myself and here I am."

"Well, George, I am indeed sorry to learn that Mr. Gilbar is so afflicted. I knew that he had been ailing for some little time, but did not know the cause of his illness. You may tell him that I will come."

"God bless you, Doctor! and may I make so bold as to say that there is someone else in our house who needs you? I know it is unbecoming of me to tell it, but our little girl is grieving her heart out. I mustn't speak any more about it, and I hope you won't think any less of me for mentioning it."

"No, I am sure you mean all right, George," said the doctor kindly, "but we won't discuss that now—it is a matter that wiser heads than yours are troubled over," and Jack considerately dismissed the old man.

The next morning, a little after the appointed time, Dr. Lykin's *coupé* stopped before No. — Fifth Avenue.

The young doctor was faultlessly attired and the passers-by, had they taken any notice, would little have thought, as he leisurely ascended the steps, what a trying ordeal this was for the young surgeon.



It had been for weeks his greatest desire to once more cross this threshold, and now that his fond hopes were to be realized, he was making an almost superhuman effort to appear dignified and to persuade himself that there was no significance to be attached to this visit, other than as it might redound to his professional skill.

Jack was ushered into the sick-room at once, and Mr. Gilbar greeted him very affably.

"Glad to see you, Doctor; we have a little something in your line, we think, which we will be pleased to have you dispose of with the least possible delay. I especially sent for you because, knowing you had made a great reputation, I thought you would not make any great ado about my little affair, nor try to string it out all Summer."

"I am very sorry to find you so helpless, Mr. Gilbar," said Jack calmly; "but let me see what is the trouble, and it will be a pleasure to get you out and all straightened up as quickly as possible."

"That's the talk, Doctor; that's the talk," replied Mr. Gilbar.

He had always liked Jack, and he was perfectly delighted at the plain, straightforward way Jack went at it—so business-like, without any intimation of the peculiar relations existing between himself and the family, either by word or look.

"Shall I make an examination now, sir?" asked the doctor.

"At once," replied Mr. Gilbar. "You kept me waiting a while, you know, as your appointment was for nine o'clock."

"Pardon me for that," was all Jack said.

After making a thorough examination, it was decided to perform the operation at four o'clock that afternoon.



Mr. Gilbar's regular physician was to be present, and one or two others.

There was some very delicate and intricate work to do, but the young surgeon had the utmost confidence in the result ; so he told Mr. Gilbar :

" You will be surprised at the relief you will feel at once and will be out in a few days ; only you will naturally have to be careful until you regain your strength.

" I shall depend on your nerve aiding me, and I will guarantee we will come through all right. Now don't grow anxious over this, Mr. Gilbar, and bring on a fever, for if you do, we will have to put it off. Then do not blame me for delaying the case."

" Never fear, Doctor ; see if I do not make a model subject. I will be just as calm when you come this afternoon as you see me now, and you have no idea of the extent of my confidence in you, which is everything."

" Very good," replied Jack. " Now take a soothing draught and sleep all you can to-day ; keep perfectly quiet ; and I shall have to ask you to not partake of any food until this is over. Good-morning, sir ;" and Jack quietly retired from the room.

Of course old George had told Nellie Miller that Dr. Lykin was coming. The old footman and Nellie were great friends and had discussed Maud's love-affair by the hour.

" Now, George, mind you don't tell Maud about Mr. Jack's coming, nor let Mr. Don know it ; for I have promised I wouldn't go to see Mr. Jack ; but now he is coming here, I can see him and, I would give my head for five minutes' talk with him."

So Nellie was waiting in the hall when Jack came from the inner chamber, and, gliding up to him, she took his



big, strong hand and raised it to her lips. "I don't believe you are bad," she said, as she began to drag him along the dimly-lighted passage.

"Is this you, Nellie? Hold on, where are you taking me?" said Jack.

"Come in here, Mr. Jack," replied Nellie, "I want to talk to you. Oh, I have lots to say. Now sit down and listen."

"Well! indeed I shouldn't have known you, had I met you anywhere else. My! how you have changed! When I saw you last, you were a little girl; now I find a young lady."

Nellie's hair was done up tastily, she had on a beautiful gown with a long train, and the few months in the city had stamped experience upon her face, thereby adding years to her appearance.

"Yes, I suppose I am quite grown up now," said Nellie, with a sigh. "Tying my curls up, and this long dress make all the difference, and I suppose it is very improper for me to have you here all alone, in my boudoir; but we haven't time to talk about that now. I want you to tell me the truth about Minna and you."

"Don't you care for Maud any more? and have you fallen in love with this Minna?"

"The idea! Nellie," said Jack; "why, you know better than that, without asking such a question."

"That is not coming right out and answering, yes, or no," continued Nellie, "which I want you to do; I don't think it is such an impossible thing for any man to fall in love with Minna; you men are all so fickle, anyhow."

"Now stop right there," interrupted Jack. "My affection for Maud is as great as it ever was—yes, for



stronger—and I do not care one bit more for Minna, nor ever did, than for any patient in whom I am especially interested as a matter of physical science. I can tell you the whole trouble in a few words.

“Immediately after Minna began to recover from the shock occasioned by the accident, I, as her physician, peremptorily prohibited either Maud or Don seeing her, in spite of their urging and insisting upon doing so. My reason for such a course was that Minna’s mind seemed to be perfectly clear and rational, and by giving her a little time, so that her brain might strengthen, I hoped that she would be as she now is, as sane and intelligent as you or I.

“Maud and Don could not appreciate the importance of this plan, so Maud—inspired by either curiosity or, more likely, some indistinct feeling of jealousy—gained an entrance into Minna’s room, where she was presented with a sight which I confess it was only natural for her to account for as she has.”

“And how do you account for it, Mr. Jack?” interrupted Nellie, eagerly.

“Just wait a minute,” said Jack. “I had been trying to recall to Minna’s mind some of the incidents in her immediate past, for, Nellie, to this day the girl has not the least recollection of ever seeing you or Don, or the cave in which she met Don. She has not the least idea of where she has ever been, previous to her sojourn in the city. She doesn’t know a thing about the smashup, says she never saw me until here in New York, and, as I said, the day Maud came to see her, I was telling her about Don; I told her what a fine fellow he was, and that I was expecting soon to marry his sister. But, no; she just sat there and smiled and said :



“ ‘ Doctor, I do not know what you are talking about. ’

“ Well, then I thought possibly she was feigning ignorance ; so I went right at her, tooth and nail, told her I wouldn’t put up with her foolishness any longer ; she wasn’t treating me right ; that Don was my best friend ; and after I had gone to all the trouble of finding him, just as you know, Nellie, she was so crazy to have us do, why, if she had determined to disavow any knowledge of the whole crowd of us, then I would just leave her to get along as best she could.

“ You see, Nellie, I put all this to her just as strongly as I knew how. All the good it did was to frighten her, and she came up to me and, sinking on her knees in the most abject and pitiful way, begged and implored me not to leave her or, as she expressed it, turn her out, as of course in her helpless condition, being so little familiar with the world, she readily divined starvation before her.

“ Now, Nellie, you have the honest, God’s truth, and there is not one bit more or less to tell.”

“ Well ! for pity’s sake, Mr. Jack, why haven’t you told this all along ? ” cried Nellie.

“ Tell you all along ! ” said Jack. “ Haven’t I tried to tell you ? haven’t I written Maud and Don, and even you ? haven’t I been refused admission to this house ? My Lord ! To whom would I tell it, the lamp-post ? Was I to stand in front of the house and hollo it out, at the top of my voice ? ”

“ Oh, pshaw ! Mr. Jack,” expostulated Nellie, “ you are not half a man. Why didn’t you go to Don’s office with a pistol, and just make him listen to you ? or why didn’t you steal me and take me in some dark alley and, with your big, long fingers, seize my back hair, while you



pressed the cold steel of a long bright blade to my throat, and say: 'Nellie Miller, listen to my vindication, and carry it to my lost love, or you die!' Ugh!"

Jack could hardly keep from smiling, but he said:

"I do not see that this is any joking matter. This terrible misunderstanding has caused poor Maud days and nights of suffering. I can see that you credit every word of what I have been telling you. Now, Nellie, do not let us keep it from Maud a moment longer; run and tell her at once, so that her heart may be lightened."

"Well, upon my word!" said Nellie, "anybody would think you hadn't the least concern about yourself. Why don't you ask me if I think Maud cares for you any more."

"Because I know it," cried Jack. "Not for one instant have I doubted this. I love Maud more than all else in the world, and this love makes my faith strong. During all this time, my only anxiety and pain has been knowing how Maud suffers, thinking the object of her love so unworthy; but, Nellie, she loves me yet."

"True love, such as Maud gave me, cannot be rooted out in a day, no matter how fierce a storm may rend it."

"Oh, Jack! Oh, my darling! those noble words, this perfect faith so boldly expressed, repay me tenfold for all I have suffered."

At these words from Maud, as she emerged from the folds of the silken draperies that divided the boudoir from the inner room where she had been concealed, Jack's face beamed with surprise and indescribable joy. "In those few, strong words you have laid bare my heart; your sublime generosity has denied me the recompense of asking your forgiveness."

"My precious one," passionately cried Jack, "I have



nothing to forgive; at no time have I blamed you. How could you have thought or acted differently? I now begin to fully realize how I have been starving for a morsel of your sweet presence."

"Well now, you dear old Jack," promised Maud, "you shall have a feast, and there need not be another word of explanation; it is all clear to me now, as I overheard every word you said to Nellie; didn't I, Nellie?"

"Yes. Let me tell you, Mr. Jack, how we did," replied Nellie. "You see, first, old George told me that you would be here this morning, and I right away made him promise not to let Maud know of it, because I feared she would forbid me seeing you and I was determined to get you out of this scrape, in return for the whippings you had saved me when a child, out on the Plains.

"But just after dinner Maud told me, also, that Dr. Lykin would be here in the morning to see her father. I don't think I ever asked her how she found it out; but I begged of her that she would give me this one opportunity of finding out the truth about you and Minna. So we schemed it out that Maud was to hide and hear what you had to offer as an excuse for your horrid conduct. I'm sure, Mr. Jack, she consented to my plans because her heart would not permit her to refuse.

"Maud can tell you the rest of it; I do not see why I have told you even this much, when Maud could have done it so much better. Now, I am going to leave you, silly things. If you will both kiss me, I will call my part of the transaction settled."

"Certainly we will," they both exclaimed.

"That is letting us off very cheap," said Jack, as he started to pay his debt.

"Bah," cried Nellie, "kiss each other, that will do me



just as well," and she ran, laughing merrily, out of the room.

Jack's duties, which had already been too long neglected, did not permit him to remain longer ; but the natural invitation to remain to dinner and all the evening, after performing the operation upon Mr. Gilbar, was most readily accepted.

"You know papa may need you any time during the evening," Maud had said.

"That's so," agreed Jack, as he bade her adieu.



## CHAPTER XIV.

YOUNG GILBAR found his man waiting, as he reached the rendezvous, even before the appointed hour.

"Didn't think I'd be here, Mr. Gilbar, did yer?" said Denney.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Don; "you said you would, but now what have you to say? My time is limited."

"Got the stuff with ye," inquired the man.

"Yes, that's all right," Don assured him; "start in, and come to the point as quickly as possible."

"Well, then, here goes. You see, my mother's name was Myrtle Denney, don't know what my father's name was,—guess I never had any. From a lad, until a short time ago, my life was spent on the Plains in the fur West. We belonged to a band of trappers, part of the time earning an honest living, although once in a while we stole horses and other plunder, just by way of a lark. We traveled over that whole country, from the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the Mississippi River. About twelve or fifteen years ago, we were on the trail in Iowa. We'd had awful hard luck just the Winter before (you see this was in the Spring) and we were just about starved out, when one day a little gal strayed into camp. She was a purty little thing, but no God's use to us; we had too many mouths to feed as it was; so we all kicked at takin' in another, 'cept my old mammy; she said: 'Let the little thing stay with us;' it couldn't eat much, and she would feed it out'en her portion. Well,



what Mammy said went, only we thought it was a mighty strange freak had come over her ; we deviled her a bit about wanting more babies, at her time o' life ; but in our hearts we thought she was gettin' old and really had a weakness for the little brat ; anyhow, the child stayed with us, and from that day prosperity rained down on us. For years and years we had everything a trapper could ask for ; we'd strike plenty of game, allers had any quantity of the finest skins every Spring, and there seemed to be no trouble sellin' 'em. After the little gal had been with us some time, she had grown to be as spry and sassy as a chipmunk ; she was all life and continually up to some prank or other : still we all had growed kinder attached to her. I mind one day, one of our fellers we called ' Snaggletooth,' was cleaning a bar trap, just outside the tent. He had a bottle of kerosene settin' on a bench that he was oilin it up with, and as he was leaning over on the ground, our little gal, ' Minna ' Mammy called her, came stepping along and seeing the bottle, shied a stone at it (she could throw truer nor any man in the camp) and clip, she took the old bottle in the neck, breakin' the glass all to flinders and upsettin' the oil all over Snaggletooth's head and down his back. It kinder took him by surprise ; he had an ugly temper, anyhow, and the way the little devil laughed at seeing Snaggletooth jump so, riled the Indian mor'n anything else, and up he jumps and bangs her over the head with the bar trap. We all thought that would end her, and if it had, we wouldn't a been long stringing up Mr. Snaggletooth, for we thought a heap of the little thing ; but she come around all right again and growed up to be the smartest and purtiest woman on the Plains. So things went along, until last Winter. We'd traveled later than usual, and it was some time in De-



cember before we went into camp. We just got settled, too, for there came some heavy snows and mighty cold weather before we were fully settled. I remember a poor devil crawling into the corral, about the time we'd got fixed; he was purty badly chawed up by the wolves, and you kin know it must have been rough weather for the wolves to attack men in that country. He was outen his mind, for he was tellin' us about him and his pard findin' some rich feller in the snow, and hidin' him in a cave, and he said him and his pard were making tracks for this cave when the wolves surrounded them. It seems the other feller died in his tracks, while he clum a tree and stayed all night, until the wolves left, when he dropped down and come to us. We took no stock in his lyin' and as he died in about an hour, we chucked him under the ice. Now all last Winter we see less of Minna, than usual. She'd been keeping putty shy for a year or two, but last Winter we had hardly seen her at all. When we broke up in the Spring, she started with us, but left again the second day and I never sot eyes on her until last night, when I accidentally run across her here. We had the biggest and best lot of pelts when we started into the settlement we ever had, but when Minna left us, our luck went with her; we couldn't find no good buyer for the skins; a heap of 'em spoiled on our hands; half of our people got sick, and finally Mammy died. You ha'n't got a chaw o' tobaccy about you, have ye, Mr. Gilbar?"

"I have not," replied Don. "Your tale has been very interesting, and I have reasons to believe that you have been telling me the truth; but, just as I feared, you have told me very little that I did not know before, for I was the man found in a cave in Iowa, and was nursed and pro-



vided for by the lady I saved from your villainous persecutions last night."

"Well, I'll be kissed-to-death and die-laughing!" cried Denney. "Is that a fact?"

"Why, certainly it is," went on Don, "and what you have told me is of very little importance; it only confirms what I had guessed at in a general way, still I believe you meant well enough, only you set too high a price on your information. Here is a thousand dollars, which is paying you well; and I hope it will keep you from want until you strike better luck," and Don began to count out a roll of bills.

"A thousand dollars!" said Denney. "Why, I don't consider I've told you anything yet; just wait, I'll earn my five thousand dollars, or nothing. I haven't told you who the gal is yet, and that's what I agreed to do. What I've just said is only explaining what I've got to tell."

"And have you more to tell?" inquired Don. "Do you know who the young lady's parents are?"

"In course I do," Denney assured him.

"Then tell me at once, sir," said Don, "tell me everything you know about her."

"Jest you keep cool and don't get excited; I want to tell you this in my own way, or I'll get all mixed up."

"All right, then," said Don, "only please do not string it out any longer than is necessary; come to the point as quickly as you can;" and, lighting a fresh cigar, young Gilbar prepared to possess himself with patience and hear the fellow out.

"You see," Denney began again, "a few hours before Mammy died, as she knowed she couldn't live, she called me to her and told me this tale."



And this was Myrtle Denney's narrative, robbed as much as possible of Denney's provincialism :

“ Some years ago, before there were any railroads in Central Iowa, a company of Pennsylvania Dutch were traveling across the plains, intending to make their homes on the rich prairies of that fertile country. They had come within a week's journey of where they were agoin' to stop, when they camped one night right in the heart of a country over-run by roving bands of Indians, who were ready for any kind of deviltry and plunder. It was a bright Spring evening, the big sun had set about an hour before, and as they unhooked their teams, the little stars began to hang out here and there in the sky. Everything was bustle and confusion ; some building fires, getting ready to cook the supper ; others picketing the tired horses ; while the little children were scampering about, tryin' to limber up their little legs, which were cramped from the long day's ride in the wagons. The leader of the company had taken special charge this night, and without saying much, so as not to frighten the women folks, had placed the wagons so as to make a good defense in case they were attacked. He knew just what he was about and right where they were ; and while he hoped there was no danger for so large and well-prepared a company, yet he wanted to make everything sure and safe, so as not to be caught napping. The business of getting settled was all well under way, and as the young captain stood out a little ways from the circle of wagons, he could hear in the far distance, way off to the West, the short, sharp barking and shrill howl of a single coyote, answered by another in just the opposite direction. By the time he had made the circuit of the camp to see that all was fixed as he wished it, the wolves seemed to be drawing nearer and were keeping up



almost a continuous howl. 'Guess there is no big game or Indians hanging around,' the young feller said to himself, 'or you wouldn't hear the coyotes around yelping so. Well, if we get through to-night all right, I think we'll be putty safe,' so he walked into the camp, and settin' his long rifle down, began pitching into the grub.

"Nobody but a frontiersman could appreciate what a relief it was to that young feller to hear those coyotes, as he knowed there couldn't be much danger yet, when they were making so much noise. Three or four hours later, all excepting the guard were sound asleep, and by then the wolves were circling about the camp, keeping up a perfect yell; they had scented the fresh meat for miles, and it would seem that every coyote in the state had come to get a piece. But all of a sudden the noise stopped and after a minute or two, scampering through the long grass, every devil's wolf of them disappeared like magic, and it was that still you could almost feel it. 'What does that mean?' whispered the captain to an old scout who had been with them fur a couple of weeks, and who knowed all the prairie signs from A to Z. While the wolves had been howling old Glen Lewis was more'n half sleeping at his post; but the second they stopped, the old scout straightened up and, grasping his long smooth bore, craned his neck, his deep-set eyes glaring into the darkness. 'Sh!' cautioned the old man, as the captain spoke to him. 'It don't mean no good to us,' he continued below his breath; 'you'd better sneak around the camp quick and see that all the pickets are awake. Come right back to me then, but tell 'em not to fire a shot at anything, or make a move, until they get orders from me or you.'

"'All right, Glen, the camp and myself are under your



orders and I do not think we could be in better hands,' said the captain.

" 'Don't brag on me, Captain, as we are going into the woods; wait until we come out. Now hurry around; I'm not saying there is any trouble brewing, but it won't hurt to be on the safe side.'

"The captain didn't wait to hear the old scout's last words before he disappeared under a wagon, and putty quick he was back again.

" 'See anything new, Glen?' asked the captain.

" 'Not yet,' replied Glen; and just then the barking of a single coyote, at an uncertain distance, was heard.

" 'Hear that, Glen?' said the captain eagerly. 'I guess we're all right; and they are coming back, and we've had our fright for nothing.'

" 'Keep still, Captain, keep still.' Old Lewis spoke even lower than ever. 'By the time you've made your fortune out here, you can tell the difference between that sound coming from the throat of a wolf and from one of them painted heathens. That's a signal, Captain; just wait now.' As he stopped speaking, there came from the other side of the camp, the mournful cry of the whip-poor-will.

" 'Didn't I tell you so?' asked old Glen. 'Them's signals, sure; I guess we are in for a little skirmish. Did you find everything all right, Captain?'

" 'All but the North side. I didn't find Denney at all and three or four of the wagons have been pulled together, leaving a big gap.'

" 'The devil!' was all the old scout said, as he started straight through the camp with the captain close at his heels.

"As they neared the gap, a dark object sprang from



under their hurrying feet ; and, with a yell, a big Indian grabbed a burning stick from one of the fires and flung it at a pile of straw. A dozen long strides and leaps brought the scout up with the red spy, and as he plunged his long knife into the Indian's back, his death cry could be heard far out on the plains.

"The young captain made for the burning pile and trampled out the fire before it had gained much headway ; then calling a few sturdy men to his side, they once more closed up their defences with the wagons not a minute too soon, as the Indians could be seen in all directions, jumping toward the camp.

"There was a fierce battle, while it lasted ; but under the experienced guidance of the old scout and the cool commands of the young captain, the bloodthirsty thieves were finally driven away, but not until a number of their band had gone to their happy hunting-grounds and three good men who had started West to better their condition, had ended their earthly career in defense of their families and friends. As the confusion died away and the captain began to restore some kind of system among his people, he looked in vain for the faithful Glen Lewis ; nowhere could he be found, among the dead, wounded or living until about daybreak he came stalking into camp, pushing and dragging a poor, dirty, blood-stained mortal with him.

"'Here's the damned villain who opened the gap and led the painted heathens onto us ; blame him for the death of yon honest fellows, then think that if he'd had his way, every mother's son of you would have been murdered and robbed of all you've got. Here he is ; I turn him over to you.'

"At sunrise they took Denney out and shot him, for it



was he who had betrayed the camp, actuated by a desire to enrich himself at the expense of his comrades. He had led the Indians to the camp and told them of the weak spot he made and the advantages of attacking that point. His young wife pleaded with the captain for her husband's life, but 'No,' the intrepid leader said, 'traitors must die.' He well knew that fearless government and speedy punishment of every crime were the only safety in that wild country.

"Myrtle Denney brooded over her loss, and six months after, left the little settlement that had been started, to lead a roving life among border ruffians. Years after, she returned to that section, her thirst for revenge never slacking.

"The young captain had prospered; he had lands and cattle, and his life was made especially happy by the presence of a little daughter whom he worshipped. It was through this love for his little girl that Myrtle struck him. She stole the child one day, when she was playing on the prairie, and intending to bring her up to a life of shame, she thought to make her vengeance complete; but, as the little girl grew, Myrtle Denney, and every one about, learned to fear her; and, regarding her as some supernatural being, did not dare to accomplish her designs, nor even take the girl's life."

All this, Peter Denney told in his stumbling way.

"Now you see," continued he, "Mammy told me this just afore she died. 'Do what ye like with my secret,' she said, 'turn it to some profit, if ye kin. George Denney was not yer father, Pete, but of all the lovers I ever had, Denney was the only one I loved.'"

"And now, who was this captain?" asked Don quietly, his intense interest making him calm.



“Hugh Lykin,” said the man, “and the gal you saw last night is his child.”

“Great God! can this be true?” cried Don. “Then her lover is her brother.”

The awful situation broke upon him, and then an evil light shone from his eyes. “To tell Jack Lykin this shall be my revenge. I will confront him, before my father’s face, with the revolting position his treachery has placed him in.”

“I do’an know jest what you are gettin’ at, Mister Gilbar, but I seen in yer eyes last light ye was in love with that gal, so I quick thought, soon as I heerd ye speak yer own name, ye had money and would be willin’ to pay for what I know’d. Now, where is my money?”

“Here it is; you have earned it. Now leave me. Good-day.”

“Thank ye sir; I wish you luck,” and, pulling his forelock, the man slunk away.

Don was late at his office, that morning, and matters of the utmost importance demanded his undivided attention during the entire day. About dark, as the lights were beginning to shine from the shop windows and the street lamps, there came to him a message from Maud.

“Come and see me to-night,” it said; “something very important.”

It would never occur to Don to slight Maud’s bidding; so he answered: “I will come.”

The operation was performed upon Mr. Gilbar and was attended with the most flattering success. Promptly at the appointed time the young surgeon came, calmly laying out upon the table the glittering array of delicate instruments which he could handle so deftly.



Finding his patient perfectly self-possessed, a beginning was made without delay. Slowly he cut into the quivering flesh, carefully sealing the tiny veins, as he progressed, and in an hour's time, he was done, and well done.

The work was complicated,—more so than had been expected—and difficulties arose that could not be anticipated; but in the end all was well, and Mr. Gilbar experienced a relief that could hardly be credited in so short a time.

Then, leaving the old gentleman resting quietly, Jack went below, to join the happy family and to pass the most delightful evening, as it afterward proved, of his life, going to show once more that, “After clouds, comes sunshine.”



## CHAPTER XV.

THEY were all in high spirits, as they waited for Don.

"He can't be much longer," Maud said. "Don is always so prompt, and he is just as punctual when he makes an engagement with me as he is with any stranger."

"Don't be so restless, Maud," remonstrated Nellie; "you have Mr. Jack. Now why not be contented for a little while? You know very well there must be something important detaining him."

"Well, there can't be anything of more importance than what I want him for. I think I will go meet him in the hall and tell him how shamefully we have treated Jack; somebody must ask Jack's forgiveness; I had no opportunity of doing so, therefore Don must."

"No, no, Maud," Dr. Lykin here chimed in. "Stay right here with us. I don't want a lot of foolishness and begging my pardon. Haven't I just been telling you, and don't I keep repeating, that it is all right, everything is all right; and you and Don would not have remained on the high plane of respect where I have always placed you, had you acted in any way differently from what you did. It was necessary for us to wait until a fitting opportunity presented itself."

"What was that you called me?" interrupted Nellie.

"I hadn't come to you yet."

"No, nor you wouldn't have come to me. I should like to know what good the opportunity would have done



had I not enabled you to embrace it or to embrace Maud, which amounts to the same thing."

"There, I hear the front door," whispered Maud. "You two stay here and quarrel it out. If that is Don, I am going to see him a minute."

Without waiting for them to detain her or to excuse herself, Maud slipped out of the room and found, as she expected, that Don had come, letting himself in quietly with his latchkey. She came up to him, as he was hanging up his hat and, turning her animated face up to his for a kiss, she said :

"Dearie, I am so glad you didn't refuse me to-night. Where were you last night? Why didn't you come home? You are working too hard, Don, and look wretched. Are you sick? Come in here, I want to talk to you," as she led him into the library.

"That's always you, Maud," replied Don, "asking a dozen questions at once, never stopping until you are out of breath. If I look wretched, I simply look as I feel; and, my dear little sister, were it not for you, I would want to end my life. Troubles seem to thicken every day, until I am weary and heart-sick, beyond endurance. But, pet, you look radiant to-night. What can have occurred? You haven't looked like this for a long time."

As he grew accustomed to the low, red-tinted light that the solitary shaded lamp diffused through the room, he could not fail to notice the brilliant flush on her cheeks.

"Don, I really do not think I ever was so happy in my life. But tell me, why did you not come home last night? Now that is only one question. Please tell me the true reason," Maud pleaded.

"The reason was the very best I could have; it was entirely because father insisted on admitting that scoun-



drel into the house. It would be an insult to name him in your presence, but you well know whom I mean. I assure you, Maud, I did all I could to prevent it, and when I failed, all I could do was to stay away myself.

“And now, little girl, I think it best to tell you that I have just learned to-day something that has added an additional abhorrence to the detestable situation. Your cruelly faithless lover deserted you and betrayed my most implicit confidence for the illicit smiles and favors of—although I believe he is innocent of this fact, as yet—his sister.”

“Don, are you sure of this?” ejaculated Maud, with a suppressed scream; “are you absolutely positive? Oh! if this could only be true.”

“How in the world does it help the matter any, you silly child; cannot you see that it only makes matters worse?” growled Don. “I confess to a grim feeling of satisfaction, but is it possible you, too, desire so earnestly to be avenged?”

“Not at all, dearie, you and I were too hasty. Poor, dear, noble Jack! He has explained everything to me.”

“Then you have seen him?” interrupted Don, with a cynical smile.

“Yes,” continued Maud, “and you may be thankful the rest of your life that your protestations against his coming were of no avail.

“The scene I told you of was occasioned by Jack’s telling this Minna about you and me, and saying that if she did not acknowledge knowing you he would turn her out in the street, and a lot of other things. I can’t go over it all now, but I am sure Dr. Lykin is as just and honorable as any one could be, and the most noble man in the world.



"Oh! Don, it would be so lovely if Minna really is his sister; but I can't understand that. Why does he not know her? It seems we never will get matters clear."

"I wonder if Jack has been acting all right?" mused Don. "It is possible we have been mistaken."

"Not only possible, but an absolute fact," insisted Maud. "Come now, dearie, do you save the reputation of the family. Jack took the advantage of me, and his great, big, unselfish heart did not give me the slightest opportunity of asking him to forgive me. Now help me out; come right along, and before Jack can say a word, go up to him, take him by the hand, and say:

"Jack, Maud and I have treated you as though we were brutes and we throw ourselves entirely upon your mercy, suing for your old-time love and affection."

"Lordie, Maud, that's an awful lot to say." Don was catching her enthusiasm. "Jack's here, is he? Well, let us go and see him. After all, I suppose it is only fair that we should give the man an opportunity to say something for himself."

"Pity we could not have come to that wise conclusion some time ago," retorted Maud; "but let us go upstairs. I left Nellie and Jack quarreling, and they may murder each other if we leave them alone too long."

"All right, come on." So they raced up the stairs, in a very undignified manner. Walking straight up to Jack, Don extended his hand, as he said:

"Jack, I am afraid I have done what would be, toward a less generous man, an unpardonable wrong. You need not explain to me now that I have been grossly mistaken during the past few weeks. Maud assures me of her perfect faith in you, and a woman's heart should outweigh a man's intellect. At our leisure, we will talk it all over;



but for the hour let us try to be as joyful as we have been so recently depressed."

"Spoken like yourself, old man," said Jack, shaking his hand heartily. "My record is open to you at any time you will do me the honor of examining it."

"Thank you," said Don; then, turning to Nellie: "What, you demure little puss, do I find you still alive and unscathed? See how tricky you girls are. Now Maud was just telling me that you and Jack were quarreling and unless we hurried to the rescue, it would be the end of one or the other; but to look at you, one would think you had been doing just the opposite to quarreling. Come, what have you and Jack been up to?"

"Why, what an exaggerator Maud is!" she replied. "We were only complimenting each other when Maud left us. She does not know what she is saying half of the time, does she, Mr. Jack?"

"You can't bring me into it," said Jack, who was carrying on an earnest conversation with his fiancée, in an undertone.

"Oh, fie, Doctor, don't be afraid of her; come right out and say what you think."

"Well then, I think," replied Jack, changing the subject deftly, "we would all better sit down here and let me tell you what I have been telling Maud, and what I am sure will interest you all, about Minna."

"Pardon me, Jack," interrupted Don, "I want to tell you a little something first, after which you may have the floor."

"Well, what is it?" asked Jack. "It seems we all have so much to say that it is hard to decide who shall have the preference; but I am satisfied to just sit and look at Maud, all the evening, if I do not get another word in."



"That was pretty, Jack," said Maud, with a bright smile.

"That was very silly," Nellie said, with a grimace—both in the same breath, which only goes to show what a difference of opinion there can be about a few spoken words.

"Jack, good friends as we have been, and much as I supposed you gave me your perfect confidence," said Don, "you never told me you had lost a little sister, very mysteriously, some years ago; yet I have just to-day been informed that such was the case, and it was told me by a perfect stranger, too."

"Now, do not feel hurt over that," Jack replied. "I will tell you all we know about it, any time. It is the only really sad event in the immediate history of our family; but it was such a blow that we seemed to have never recovered from it. So heavily did it fall on father, that we made it the study of our lives not to refer to it, of later years, in any way; so that it has grown to be second nature with us all never to say a word about it, although I assure you Winnie (that was her name) is seldom absent from our minds. I am sure father broods over his loss day and night.

"Then, too, there has been no especial occasion for me to talk to you of this, and I would not just willfully inflict any of my sorrows upon you; but who told you of it?"

"No matter now who told me," said Don. "You know she was lost on the prairie when she was about seven years old, so do I; but I know she was stolen by one who had, or thought she had, cause for vengeance against your father: you did not know that. Then I know what you may still hope for, but it must be getting to be a very



faint hope, that she is yet alive. I have seen her in the last few days ; so have you, Jack. If what I have so far claimed to know is true, then it is also true that Minna is——”

At the pronouncing of Minna's name, Jack sprang to his feet.

“ Oh ! father, for your sake, more than all the rest, I thank God,” he said. “ I see it all now. Why could I not discern this before ? When she shades her eyes with her hand, she is father to a dot ; when she commands, it is the same low, sweet voice that father has ; but there is force behind that which is irresistible, and the most obstinate never think but to obey. Thousands of times the light has been breaking through to my weak brain ; but I could not grasp the thought. Never for an instant did it dawn upon me that it was our Winfred.

“ Fool, fool, fool that I have been ! And Don, my more than friend, it is you who brings this great joy to us. We can never reward you.”

And Jack paced the floor in a perfect paroxysm of joy, embracing Don and both the young ladies, with equal force and favor. Of course this unnatural state of affairs could not last long, and he soon grew calm.

Then he asked : “ Would you telegraph home, or write, or what would you do ? ”

Maud answered : “ I think I would write to Nellie's father, or someone else who will break the news gently to your people ; a telegram would never do, and even a letter, no matter how carefully written, might result very seriously.”

“ I think just like Maud,” chimed in Nellie. “ Some one should tell your father this, so as not to startle him ; but it would never do to trust papa with such a mission.



Poor, dear papa ! I can just imagine him reading your letter, and then it would be :

“ ‘ Well, I swan ! Don’t that beat you, mother ? ’

“ Then out he would go, saddle up old Dolly and run her every step of the way to the Squire’s. He would try to ride the whole distance in an hour, and Mr. Jack’s folks would be frightened at the start to see him coming at a break-neck speed. Should he see the Squire rushing out at hearing Dolly’s hoofs, he would blurt right out :

“ ‘ Hugh, your little girl is found. They sent word to me to tell you, for fear you couldn’t stand it if they wrote you.’

“ That’s the way papa would break it gently. No, no ; it might do to risk a telegram, but never to trust it to papa.”

“ I’ll write mother,” said Jack, at last. “ She will take it calmly and know best how to tell father. Yes, I will write her. I wonder how Winnie will take it ? Will she remember any of us ? You know I am only two years older than she, and we were playmates together, as well as brother and sister. Well, I will write mother to-night, that is the first thing.”

“ Jack, you must take me to see your sister to-morrow morning,” said Maud, “ then we will have her come right here and stay until your father is prepared for her home-coming.”

“ You are too good, Maud,” Jack replied. “ Wait until we are married. Then I will have the whole family come, and we will give you a little insight into what entertaining ‘ country cousins,’ means.”

“ They will be perfectly welcome,” Maud said gayly.

“ But indeed, Jack, I am in earnest. You will naturally wish to devote a good portion of your time to her, and if



we are all together, I shall not be deprived of your company so often, and I am sure it will be a pleasure to us all to have her."

"Yes, do please have her come, Mr. Jack," urged Nellie, adding her influence to the pressure that was being brought to bear. "I would want her to come right in with me. Remember it was I who found her, and she never would have come to New York, only for me. We all want her, don't we, Mr. Don?" with a sly glance in that gentleman's direction.

"You would hardly expect me to object to anything the ladies so much favor," Don answered.

"Oh my!" laughed Nellie, "what a matter of perfect indifference it is to you whether she comes or not. We ladies are certainly very grateful for the disinterested support we are receiving from the young master."

"Go ahead, Nellie," said Don, with a broad smile. "I prefer your withering sarcasm to laying bare my heart before this select assembly. What is it, George?" turning to that functionary, as he appeared in the doorway.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Gilbar would like to see the doctor a few moments."

"I will go right along with you," said Jack, jumping up. "I hope Mr. Gilbar isn't uncomfortable, or that anything is going wrong. Excuse me, Maud; I will be back presently, Don," and, nodding to Nellie, the young doctor repaired to Mr. Gilbar's room, where he found that the natural swelling from the recent operation had caused the bandages to tighten uncomfortably.

Mr. Gilbar explained that his nurse could have given him the necessary attention, but that Mrs. Gilbar had told him, inadvertently, that Doctor Lykin was spending the



evening with Maud and that she believed Don was home, also ; and he wanted the opportunity of congratulating Jack upon the happy termination of their misunderstanding as, under the circumstances, he naturally supposed that any slight unpleasantness which possibly had existed was now removed.

Jack attempted to go over the story with his prospective father-in-law, but Mr. Gilbar said :

“ No, my boy, not a word ; I cannot be annoyed with all these little foibles. My only suggestion is that, as I understand you have your matters all settled in the West, you have Maud name an early day for your wedding. Then take a good, long trip before you become overwhelmed with patients ; plan for a good, long extended tour. They tell me Don has been making some especially lucky turns on the Street, and I will see that he pays the expenses, as a wedding gift to Maud. Now make them big, so that Don can do himself justice.”

“ How can I ever thank you, Mr. Gilbar ? So far as the wedding-day is concerned, I wish it could be to-morrow ; the other matter, giving you credit as I do for such laudable intentions, it would be discourteous to flatly refuse, therefore it should be discussed and I hardly know how to begin.”

“ Then don't begin,” interrupted Mr. Gilbar. “ Now, Doctor, I have always given you credit for being a sensible young man and in the future let us have **no** foolishness between you and me. I know that you are not at all mercenary, and having said this once, it is not necessary for me to repeat it. As soon as you and Maud are married, I intend to settle such an amount upon her that you cannot spend the half of the income it will bring you ; so that you need never give a thought to money matters.



This will leave you free to pursue your profession, until you have attained the highest degree.

"If I live to see the day when I am spoken of as 'Dr. Lykin's father-in-law,' I shall feel fully repaid for what little I shall have done in furthering your advancement.

"Not another word," as Jack again began to interpose objections. "I do not wish to speak of this after to-night; and you will disappoint me beyond measure if you ever at any time raise a dissenting voice to my plans in regard to you and Maud. I hope we understand each other. Now go and talk it over with Maud, and the sooner you are married the more pleased I shall be."

There seemed to be very little left for Jack to say, so he merely replied :

"I trust we shall all live long enough for me to show my appreciation of your exceptional generosity. I feel confident you will rest easily to-night, and that we shall have you out in a very short time. Good-night, sir."

After Jack left Mr. Gilbar, he found Maud waiting alone for him. Nellie might have been found, had they taken a little trouble to look for her, deeply engrossed in the pages of a love story; but, strange to relate, they did not take this slight trouble to look for her. As for Don, Maud, with the meekest simplicity, proposed :

"Do not let us bother him. No doubt the poor fellow is very tired with the busy day I am sure he must have had."

So they were left in undisputed solitude, of which Jack made the very best use in obeying Mr. Gilbar's edicts and prevailing upon Maud to name the all-important day.

"My heart is ready to fly to you at once, dear," said Maud; but there are innumerable material arrangements that are necessary and require time; I could not possibly



promise to be ready, before—let me see—” and then, after a moment of the profoundest thought and apparently accurate calculations, Maud named a day in the halcyon month of October. That most important matter being settled, they passed on to another only a little less interesting subject.

“Jack, you are sure that we have not jumped at a conclusion too hastily?” said Maud. “Is there no possibility of our being mistaken, and Minna not being your sister, after all?”

“There is not the slightest doubt about it,” Jack assured her.

“I am only surprised that I did not discover it myself. Why, the very first time I ever saw her, there was something familiar about her, and some undefined power drew me toward her. No, Maud, it is surely just as Don told it.”

“How early dare we go to see her in the morning?” asked Maud, bright anticipation sparkling in her eyes. “You can’t imagine how impatient I am, and it was so nice of you to consent to her coming here.”

“What a diplomat you are, Maud,” laughed Jack. “I do not remember having consented to this at all; yet I am really more than willing that she should come; it will be so very much more pleasant for her than anywhere else. So, if she wants to come—and I guess there is no doubt about that—it will be another payment of happiness by you to me. How can I ever get out of debt?”

“You have paid me back with interest for all the pleasure I have ever given you, so there is nothing due on that score.”

Then the conversation drifted on. They talked of the



few weeks just past, that had dragged so heavily for them both, and of Don and Mr. Gilbar's affliction, together with the prospect of his speedy recovery, and various other matters, until it was time for Jack to leave.

That night Jack wrote his good old mother a long, carefully-worded letter, so that as she should follow the lines of his bold, plain handwriting, the truth would gradually dawn upon her that their little girl, the father's favorite, over whom there had been so many years of anxious longing, had been found; true, not the little girl she was when taken from them, but a beautiful woman, lovely in face and figure, of a charming disposition, and in every way a daughter that the fondest parents might look upon with pride.

There was no need to warn the faithful wife that she should impart the glad tidings most carefully to her loving spouse; but of this, too, did Jack write.

When through, the young doctor felt that he had done what was best and could calmly await the result, being a firm believer that "joy never kills."

Maud was up betimes the next morning and nervously awaiting Jack's coming. He was not so very late, but they were only just in time to intercept Minna as she was going out. Jack accosted her with:

"We are just in time, aren't we, Minna?" and taking her proffered hand, he pressed it with a new-found tenderness. "Minna, allow me to present to you Miss Gilbar, of whom you have so often heard me speak."

The beautiful girl raised her wondrous eyes with a look of divine thankfulness.

"Oh! how delighted I am that we at last meet. Your coming with Dr. Lykin has a double significance; it tells me that my unfortunate conduct, the only time before



that you ever saw me, is no longer a bar to the happiness of you both."

"No, Winnie, that has all been explained, and the doctor and I understand each other again," Maud said, with a faint little blush at the reference to herself and Jack; "and I have wanted to see you so badly, as we have both heard so much of each other. I trust it will not take long for us to become fully acquainted and, if you will not think me too forward, I want to ask you to come home with me and stay just as long as you can be contented. Will you come, Winnie?"

"Why do you call me 'Winnie?'"

"Because that is your name; did you not tell me, Doctor, that your sister's name was Winfred?"

"Winnie, Winnie, Winfred, the doctor's sister?" murmured the beautiful girl. "It seems to me I was Winnie, somebody's little sister Winnie; but that must have been so long ago."

"Do you remember it?" cried Jack eagerly. "Do you remember father and mother and the freckled lad that dug out chipmunks with you on the prairies? Can you remember any of these things, Winnie?"

"Yes, I think I remember all of that; oh, I am sure I do. I wonder where Jack is? How I should love to see him."

"I am he; this is Jack grown up just the same as you are."

"How wonderful!" she continued, her eyes growing larger and brighter and the color rising in her cheeks from the excitement and interest that was so unexpectedly being brought before her. "How I should love to believe that you are truly Jack, as you say you are, Doctor. Something tells me that it is as you say."



“And where is papa? Why is he not here? I remember going way out on the prairie to meet him one day when he was away, and I must have lost my way for I couldn’t find papa.

“When I started to return I never got back home again. After a while I came up with some people who were traveling and they told me they would take me home; but I think they must have not known who I was or where I wanted to go. This certainly was many years ago. And now here I am in the city, and you, Doctor, my best friend, tell me I am your sister. Why did you not take me home when you found me on the plains, as you are all the time telling me you did?”

“Well, you see, Winnie,” explained Jack, “I did not know you were my sister until yesterday; but we shall have plenty of time to tell you all about that. I have written mother that we have found you, and that our little girl is now a very beautiful young lady, and just as kind and good as she is beautiful.”

“Do all brothers say such nice things about their sisters?” asked Winfred, with a merry laugh, “or is this one especially complimentary?”

“Well, in the first place,” Maud assured her, “all brothers are not fortunate enough to be able to say nice things truthfully; then, too, I suppose Jack would snub me for a week if I didn’t add something about his being an exceptional brother.”

“Upon my word,” interrupted Jack, “you deserve much credit for speaking well of me, as you evidently do so entirely from a sense of duty.

“But come, Winnie, Miss Gilbar has kindly invited you to spend the time that must intervene before we can hear from father at her home, and I can vouch for her really



being desirous of your accepting the invitation. So what do you say? Would you like to go, and how soon could you be ready?"

"I should love above all things to go with Miss Gilbar. It has been my dream for the past few weeks to know you and to make you let me love you."

While Winnie was speaking, she, with an almost imperceptible movement, gently placed her arm about Maud's waist.

"And this was when I thought of you as the promised wife of only my best friend; but now that you will be my sister, my heart goes out to you all the more."

Then after imprinting a kiss on Maud's fair brow, she withdrew her tender embrace as she inquired:

"But are you sure that my coming will not in any way be a burden to you?"

"Indeed, it can be nothing but a pleasure," Maud assured her.

So, before nightfall, Winfred was comfortably domiciled in the Gilbar mansion, and never had the Gilbars a more welcome guest.

Her dazzling beauty caught every eye and held it entranced, while her stately, although at the same time thoroughly affable, ways won the hearts of all who came in contact with her.

It could soon be seen that she had a true sisterly affection for Dr. Lykin, but for this her heart had been prepared during the long weeks that he had been so kind and faithful to her. She was not as restless or impatient to see her father and mother as might have been expected. She would ask every day, with evident interest, if anything had been heard from them; but having been so long parted from her home ties, and so much of her life



being a blank to her, she seemed to fit into the pleasures and gaieties about her without any pining for other associations.

Don and Nellie happening to meet in the hall the first evening, came into the room together and met Winnie. Maud introduced them with the least possible ceremony, simply saying: "Miss Miller and my brother, Don, Winnie."

Don waited a moment, until the greeting between the ladies was over, and then he extended his hand and assured her of a hearty welcome, as he said, with a pleasant smile:

"We have met before. Jack, here, tells me that he does not think I will have much difficulty in gaining your acknowledgment of one meeting; but you see I have laid claim to a long-time friendship existing between us. I am right in this, am I not? Now be careful; remember these folks are terrible teasers and unless you support my bold assertion they will worry me distracted."

As Don paused for a reply, he motioned her to be seated, placing a chair by her side for himself.

"I surely met you in the Park a few evenings ago," she answered, the infectiousness of Don's smiling countenance reflected in her own bright eyes. "It would be inhuman of me to deny that meeting, and I remember that both by manner and words you claimed prior acquaintance with me at that time."

"There, did I not tell you so?" exclaimed Don, turning triumphantly to the others.

"Oh, that proves nothing," they all agreed.

"But, as I said then," continued Winnie, "much as I wish for your sake it could be otherwise, I am sure I do not remember ever setting eyes upon you before."



"Disappointed again," Don pretended to growl, although he had expected nothing else. "Well, I am a very persistent fellow and will wager you a sealskin sack against one of your bright smiles that you will acknowledge in the presence of these witnesses, before snow flies, that you and I are old friends and have spent weeks in each other's society."

"What a reckless gambler you are, Mr. Gilbar! I have so little to pay, even should I lose, compared with your handsome wager; besides, you haven't a shadow of a chance for winning."

"The wager is unequal, I grant you," said Don, in a low voice. "For one of your sweet smiles I would give all the seals in Alaska."

"Oh, say, Don," broke in Jack, "we all heard that, and it must be stopped; you are doing the other ladies a great injustice, and I won't sit still and listen to it."

"That will do, gentlemen; the foils are on the next floor; go there and fight this out immediately," commanded Nellie.

However, the combined efforts of the ladies restored peace without their being deprived of the company of the fierce combatants.

Something more than a week passed before Jack received an answer to his letter to his mother. When it came, it was full of thankfulness for this great and unexpected happiness.

The Squire had received the joyful news with a calm delight, his deep thankfulness being almost pitiful to behold. Anticipating some possible excuse, or delay, over Winnie's coming home at once, he had started for New York the same day as the letter and might be expected any hour.



He had the address of Jack's office and would come there first; so, with a spirit of mercy, Jack was to see that there should be no unnecessary delay after the Squire reached the city to prevent his meeting his beloved and long-lost child.



## CHAPTER XVI.

IT was later in the day than he had expected when a hansom came rattling up to the curb and stopped in front of Dr. Lykin's down town office. True, Jack had not been advised definitely as to what train his father would come on, but by studying the railway guide he had decided that if the Squire made proper connections from the West, he would be due in the city at a certain hour.

As it was much past this time, Jack had just about come to the conclusion that his father would not reach New York until some time in the night, when that gentleman stepped nimbly from the vehicle that had just drawn up to the side of the pavement, paid his fare and walked briskly into the doctor's office.

The young surgeon was putting in his time examining a new case of instruments that had been received that day. Hearing someone enter the room, he turned about as his father interrogated :

"Is this Doctor——" and then noticing who it was standing at the table, "Hollo, Jack! Glad to see you, my boy," grasping his hand and giving it a hearty shake.

"Why, how d'y' do? I have been looking for you for the last two hours. Upon my word, you are looking well; you look ten years younger than you did when I left you."

"And I feel twenty years younger," said the Squire. "You can't know what a weight has been lifted from my mind, nor what a joy has been carried to my heart. I



don't think I ever gave up the hope of finding Winnie some day ; but it was a great drain upon my will power to maintain this faith for so many years.

"If Winnie had died when she was a little girl, I would have, in time, recovered from the blow ; but the uncertainty of her fate made me an old man comparatively early in life."

As he looked, while speaking, Squire Lykin would have attracted attention anywhere ; his lustrous black eyes sparkling with life and animation ; the utmost good will and happy expectancy beaming from his bronzed face.

As he stood there, firm and erect, the sad, hopeless expression that he had worn so constantly in later years, had disappeared entirely from his mouth, and the parted lips, disclosing a remarkable set of white teeth, considering his age, had a curl about them that would lead one to think there might be a good deal of mischief in the old man yet.

"Sit down a minute, father," said Jack. "I appreciate how impatient you must be to go at once to Winnie ; so I will not keep you long ; but there are one or two things I wish to say."

"There is nothing the matter, is there, Jack ?" inquired his father, anxiously. "I can stand any amount of additional good news, but any disappointment now I believe would kill me."

"Oh ! no," Jack assured him. "I did not mean to startle you. Winnie is here, within twenty minutes' ride of us. She is perfectly well and happy, and you would be justified in being the proudest parent in the city to-night. Just as I wrote mother, you could not find a sweeter, kinder-tempered girl anywhere. And you will also agree with me, for I used to hear them say that you were once a



judge in such matters," this, with a mischievous smile, "that your daughter is the most radiantly beautiful girl that you ever saw. But this is what I want to say, father :

"You have in your mind's eye a little girl, all affection, who would run to you, climb into your lap and be in for a romp, pulling your whiskers and plying you with a thousand inconsistent questions ; but what you will see in a few minutes is a young lady, tall and magnificently developed, with a dignity that is a part of her. And while I am sure she will welcome you with all the tender love and affection that she has for you, yet it may be she will do this in a different way from what you are expecting, and it is only to prepare you for this greeting, so that your joy may not be overshadowed with even a shade of disappointment, that I wish to tell you this."

"Well, Jack, I understand just what you wish to express," replied the Squire, "and I am fully prepared for the natural state of affairs. I well know that it is impossible to turn back the wheels of time and to have everything just as it was ten or twelve years ago. Do not have any anxiety on my account. The inestimable joy of finding Winnie alive and a pure, noble woman, will overbalance any possible desire for the happy days when she was a little girl and the light of her doting father's eyes."

"Good," said Jack, "my *coupé* is at the door. We will start at once. Our friends, no doubt, are anxiously awaiting our coming."

The meeting between Winnie and her father was most affecting ; only for a brief moment did the beautiful girl stand with a timorous hesitancy, then she gave free vent to her overpowering feelings and, unmindful of the



presence of those about her, rushed into her father's arms.

"Papa, dear Papa," was all she could articulate, as she kissed him over and over again.

For a time they left father and child alone. What these happy moments were to the honest old farmer is beyond describing.

When he joined the family circle later on, he was running over with exuberant spirits and proved to be a most entertaining acquisition to the little company.

He teased Jack and Maud to his heart's content, appealing to Don for confirmation and support in all his playful sallies.

Mrs. Gilbar he repeatedly complimented, with old-time gallantry, while little Nellie the old Squire courted in the most extravagant manner, much to the amusement of that young lady herself and to the others as well.

He was the life of the evening and when Mr. Gilbar joined them, later on, the Squire began telling him such extraordinary tales about the vast possibilities and profits in the cattle business on the ranches, that Jack thought it best to check him.

"By George! father, for the credit of the family I can't sit still and let you get off such whoppers; the idea of one man owning a million head of cattle."

"Why, certainly he could," insisted the Squire, "these immense ranges are just opening up; you don't——"

"Oh, well, all right," interrupted Jack, laughing. "Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Lykin is not used to the strong cigars and wine he has had this evening; so you will have to bear with him and make an allowance for his extravagant ideas."

"Jack, you rascal, go right home and straight to bed,"



commanded his father, with feigned severity. "Not another word out of you, sir; and you will know it when I let you go calling again."

But in spite of these interruptions, which were repeated at intervals, the Squire succeeded in imbuing Mr. Gilbar with the idea that there was money to be made in the West, as well as in Wall Street, and securing his partial promise that as soon as he fully recovered his health he would take "a flyer" on some of Squire Lykin's Western schemes.

After spending some ten days in the city, Squire Lykin was ready to return to the West. Winfred could hardly decide whether to return with him or remain in the city. Finally, upon Maud's earnest solicitations, it was determined that she would stay until after Maud's wedding, as that time was not so very far distant. Immediately after that event Winnie would go home, and as Mr. and Mrs. Gilbar were expecting to go abroad for the Winter, they would close the house, for a time, and Nellie Miller, too, would return to the West.

The days and weeks had gone by, as days and weeks have a habit of doing, until there were only seven days more before the day upon which Maud and Jack were to be married.

Winfred Lykin had appeared in the firmament of fashionable society as the most brilliant star that had ever passed before the all-powerful and searching lens of the critics' telescope.

She seemed to be above criticism, both in her manners and extreme beauty; she was constantly spoken of in the best circles, but no one was ever heard to say that they wished that this, that, or the other thing about her could be a little different.



Don was wholly and completely enraptured with her, and the constant attention she received from so many really desirable quarters kept him in a perfect ferment of uncertainty.

This state of mind was very materially abetted by Winfred's manner toward him. She was at all times the very personification of affability; at the same time there was a certain proud demeanor in her actions that held him aloof, while it bound him all the more securely to her.

Since the first slight insinuation Don had made the evening of her coming to his home, he had never touched in the most remote degree upon the subject of his having met her before she came to the city. He feared that, should he insist on this, it might place him in a false light; and as yet he was by no means so confident of his position in her widening circle of friends as to risk so bold a "*coup de maitre*" as he regarded the telling her of the life they led during the past Winter would be.

A select company of Don's most intimate friends were taking a trip up the Hudson in Don's handsome yacht. They had been discussing the approaching wedding, until first one and then another had apparently tired of the subject for a time and were scattering to different parts of the commodious boat.

Don, as host, saw that each one of his guests was well provided with all the comforts the circumstances permitted; and as they all seemed to be enjoying themselves, he felt at liberty to follow Winfred to the upper deck, where his ever-watchful eye had seen her disappear a few minutes before.

Don had exerted a more or less amount of generalship in pairing his party, so that he found Winfred alone, just as he expected he would.



“And how is Miss Lykin enjoying it?” he asked, as he drew near her.

“This is perfectly delightful, Mr. Gilbar,” she replied, with the rosiest of smiles. “How good and generous you are to enable so many of us to pass such a happy day! It is well when vast wealth is placed in such hands as yours.”

“Please stop right there, Miss Winfred.”

Don had no intention of allowing the time to be wasted on generalities, nor was his a character that would quietly listen to undeserved praise.

“Do not say another word,” he begged, “about my being good and generous. I have led the most selfish life imaginable; never did a thing that was of any use to anyone; in fact, I never did anything of any account for myself except kill time, and even this trip to-day was planned by me through a thoroughly selfish motive. That motive was that I might spend the day with you, and I could conceive of no greater pleasure than that would be.”

“Oh, I am so glad my presence will be a pleasure to you,” Miss Lykin replied.

The very calmness with which she spoke, the total absence of any coquetry, took away the whole force of Don's plain-spoken compliment.

“But you do not do yourself justice,” she continued; “you could just as well have enjoyed my company at home; and had you been so selfish, that is what you would have done; but, instead, you make us both happy, as well as your other friends, by giving us this lovely ride which has grown so old to you that I have no doubt it is very tiresome.”

“Then you are happy only because of the boat ride?”



asked Don, "and my being here isn't to be taken into account?"

"What causes that long straight line in our wake?" inquired Miss Lykin, completely ignoring Don's pointed question.

As she had apparently taken no notice of his last words, Don began to grow a little irritated.

His sojourn with this beautiful girl the Winter before and her undisguised love for him at that time were ever present in Don's mind, and it was distressing to him in the extreme to have her now treat him no worse, it was true, but at the same time, very little, if any, better than she did the other gentlemen about her.

"Miss Lykin," he said, unable to wholly keep some of the feeling out of his voice, "if it were anyone else but you, I would be persuaded that there was a deliberate effort being made to keep everything of a strictly personal character out of the conversation. There was a time when you were unwilling to talk of anything but ourselves; for as I have said at other times, our acquaintance dates back of our meeting in the Park."

"Now, Don,"—it was the first time she had ever called him "Don" and it sent a thrill of such exquisite joy through his veins that he was fully repaid for bringing this tête-à-tête about—"I will not plead ignorance of your meaning. As your sister's guest, and partaking, as I do, from day to day of your kind courtesies, I cannot find it in my heart to feel provoked at your pressing this strange tale upon me. Jack has told me parts, at different times, until I think I have the whole; and now, once for all, I wish to tell you, what I have never told him, that there must be some strange mistake somewhere. That I never met you before the evening you so bravely defended



me I cannot be sure of, for there is a period in my life that it is impossible for me to account for ; but even granting what Jack has told me of you and me to be true, whatever may have occurred, please understand, so far as my part in it was concerned, I was entirely unaccountable for what I did ; and for you to refer to that time in the most remote degree will be the most unpleasant thing that I can imagine.

“When you speak of a previous acquaintanceship between us, it can only lead, should we pursue the topic, to the most embarrassing subjects for me. At first, I cared very little, in fact not at all, for what you said ; but, now that I know from Jack all that is in your mind, I hope you care enough for me not to endeavor to press upon me a subject, a history, that redounds so much to my discredit. Shall we join the others, Mr. Gilbar? I think I should like to go below.”

What could Don say? Winfred had a way about her that impressed him that she was right. She had spoken with the most tender kindness and, at the same time, with such a haughty mien, that he felt at once her superiority. Still he must make some excuse ; it would never do to part with her so.

“Miss Lykin, you evidently misconstrue my meaning and intentions, since Jack has told you how and where I first met you. You must understand that our relations were of the most pleasing character to me, and I try to refer to that time solely because I wish to re-establish the claims I then had to your regard.” Don said all this earnestly, but she would not listen to him further.

“Enough,” she said, “another word and you will displease me beyond forgiveness ; if you aspire to my affection in the slightest degree, or to the least extent of the



position you insist you once held, you must cease this referring to the past and begin anew."

"Then wait, let me begin now;" cried Don, as she began moving toward the companionway. "Do not tell me I have already offended you."

"No, not now," she replied, with her ravishing smile. "You have not offended me; but do not let us talk of this more to-day;" and before Don could say anything further, she had disappeared down the hatchway.

In spite of his most earnest endeavors, he was unable to speak to her again alone during that afternoon and in fact until after the wedding, as the following week was one of excitement and preparation incident to the approaching nuptials.

At last the day arrived and the weather was everything they could wish for, bright and clear and unusually cool for so early in the Autumn.

Maud made a very sweet looking bride, and long afterwards the guests spoke of the ceremony and subsequent festivities with the most enthusiastic encomiums.

Dr. Lykin and his bride had started on what was intended to be an extended tour, and in a few days more the Gilbar mansion would be closed for an indefinite period.

The evening after the wedding Don found himself once more alone with Winfred. She and Nellie had their trunks packed and were ready to start for the West the next day.

"Whatever shall I do after you are all gone?" asked Don of his beautiful companion.

"It will seem a little strange, for a time," Winfred replied, "but you will not mind it long. Maud has often told me how you cared for your club life only, and you



will have that just the same ; in fact, you will be left undisturbed to follow your inclinations."

"I suppose you are very impatient to get away," Don continued. "Do you imagine you will enjoy a country life, or would you care more for living here in the city?"

"Well, I don't know about that," she replied. "I have been so happy here, the past few weeks ; every one has been so kind to me ; there is so much excitement and animation about the life you lead here, that I am not sure how it will be when I get home. Of course I am anxious to see papa again and I have no doubt I shall be very happy out there, too."

"Still," mused Don, aloud, "the prairies do not seem to be the place for you, and your short reign, as belle of the season, is only the stepping-stone to a brilliant future, if you will but come again and ascend triumphantly the throne of fashion."

"What a flatterer you are, Mr. Gilbar," she laughed. "Do you talk so to all the young ladies?"

"Upon my word, I never spoke so to anyone before," he retorted, "or at least, if I have, I did not mean it."

"It is well you added that last," she said. "By the way, Mr. Gilbar, did you know that Nellie and I would have company as far as Chicago? Lieutenant Vasey's furlough has expired, or at least will expire in a few days, he told me last evening, and he has kindly offered to escort us a part of the distance, as he will be returning to his post of duty."

"Vasey's kindness is very disinterested, I am sure," interrupted Don, flushing up. "I wonder why he never said a word of this to me to-day."

"I met him in the gymnasium this morning and, as he said he was a little sore and stiff from last night's dissi-



pation (no wonder he was sore, waltzing so much with you")—this last *sotto voce*,—"he wanted me to put on the gloves with him. Charlie is a very good sparrer, but he seemed to be preoccupied some way this morning and left his guard open repeatedly. As a gentleman I of course did not take advantage of this: I wish, now, I had knocked him down."

"And, pray, what has happened?" asked Winfred, with a look of amusement out of her big eyes at Don's vehemence. "What has caused you to change your mind so suddenly and to think this evening, any more than this morning, that it would be gentlemanly to knock down a man who was not up to his usual form, in a friendly encounter?"

"Well, then, why is he going to the front so soon? I am sure his leave is not over for ten days or two weeks yet," said Don. "He is going just because he wants to follow you. I suppose he will go on home with you?"

"I most certainly shall ask him to, now that you have told me he has the time yet to spare," was Winfred's comforting assurance, "although I should not have tempted him from his duty had you not told me this."

Don bit his lip with annoyance, and then inquired:

"Are you in love with Vasey, Miss Lykin?"

"I should think I ought to answer that question to Lieutenant Vasey, himself, first, and of course I can't tell him until he asks me."

"Oh, he hasn't asked you yet?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Gilbar; but aren't you growing a little personal?"

"Well, perhaps I am. The only excuse I have to offer is my own deep feelings where you are concerned."

Lieutenant Vasey had apparently been the most favored



of all the gentlemen who had vied with each other in paying court to the lovely girl, the short time she had appeared among them. He was of a good old family, with fair financial prospects and one of Custer's most favored young officers. Being of a sunny temperament, versatile and full of incidents that he had picked up in his varied life, he was the best of company, so that it would have been a matter of surprise had any young lady been indifferent to his attentions.

Don and Charlie Vasey had been boys together and at all times were very good friends. The young Lieutenant's attentions to Winfred had not been especially noticed by Don, as he was closely occupied, as yet, with his father's business, and they had been together many times that Don did not know of; besides, there were so many always hovering about Winfred that it was hard to say that she preferred one to another.

But when it came to a matter of young Vasey leaving his boon companions and returning to his command before the time his leave had expired, the case must be getting serious; and then, what if Vasey should accompany Miss Lykin all the way home and spend two weeks there? What possibilities there were in two weeks! They would be dependent largely on each other for amusement; and, all at once, it seemed to break upon Don that they were in love with each other already.

"Miss Lykin," he said after a short time, "I wish you wouldn't ask Vasey home with you; of course, if you have consented to his going as far as Chicago, I suppose there is no way of getting out of that; but please draw the line at Chicago."

"And why shouldn't I invite him home? I will be lonesome at times, unless you will come and make us a visit."



"Would you like to have me?" cried Don, his hopes bounding high at the winning tone of her sweet voice and the inviting expression of her beautiful face, as much as at the vast range of meaning there might be in her few spoken words. "Winfred, may I tell you now how much I——"

"Someone to see Miss Lykin," announced old George, as he appeared in the open doorway, with his silver salver.

"Lieutenant Vasey," whispered Winfred, as she glanced at the card.

"Damn Vasey!" ejaculated Don, too much annoyed to select his words.

"Show the gentleman in, George," Miss Lykin said, without the least change or ruffle in her manner.

"Why, how do you do, Lieutenant?" she inquired cordially, as the young officer entered. "It was very kind of you to call, especially as Mr. Gilbar has just been telling me you felt rather used up after the pleasures of yesterday."

"Good-evening, Miss Lykin. How are you, Don?" this from Vasey, as he greeted them.

Don bowed coolly and turned away, unable to conceal his annoyance. "Why need this fellow come poking about?" he thought. "Nobody wants him."

Don assumed this, looking at the matter from his own standpoint. When he thought of what a delightful and all-important evening they might have spent, uninterrupted, he could have throttled his brilliant rival. So Don sat and sulked, while the young officer entered into the conversation with his usual dash and the utmost good-humor.

"I was rather done up after last night," he acknowledged, "but I am all right now and shall be fresh as a



daisy for our journey to-morrow ; just thought I would run around a minute and see how you all were and if you had any orders to issue before we began our march."

And so he rattled on, lengthening his minutes into hours, until at last it grew so late that common decency compelled him to go.

Nellie had joined them in the meanwhile and exerted herself to entertain Don, but with poor success.

"What is the matter with Mr. Don?" she asked Winfred, after they had retired to their rooms and were disrobing for the night ; "I never knew him to be so disagreeable."

"How should I know, child?" Winnie answered curtly.

"Well, upon my word, Winnie, you are just as bad ; guess I had better get to myself, then I will be in the best company I can find to-night."

"Do not go, Nellie. Was I rude to you? Come and brush out my hair and I will try to be just as lovable as you can wish."

So Winfred slipped on a loose, pale-blue gown and, seating herself, Nellie took down the long, shining hair.

"Do you think Don cares for me, Nellie?" she asked.

"He simply adores you, Winnie, and always has," replied Nellie.

"And did I love him so, once?" continued Winnie.

"Why, what a funny question to ask me!" said Nellie, "how should I know? You do not seem to love him half as much now as you do that light-headed Lieutenant ; yet Don is worth a whole army of Vaseys."

"But before I came here," mused Winfred, as Nellie brushed and caressed the glossy tresses, "Jack says when you and he found me I just worshipped Don, and was for wandering all over the world to find him. Of course I do



not doubt Jack, but do you think I loved Don, or ever saw him, before I came here?"

"Indeed you did, Winnie," Nellie assured her, and then she told her of their meeting; how they were in the railroad wreck, and of Don's anxiety and watch the long night when they thought Winnie would die, and the poor fellow's wild delight when he learned that his darling would live.

And then she added: "It is very hard on Don, loving you as he does and remembering how you once loved him, to feel that you care for someone else now."

"Poor, dear Don!" murmured Winfred. "If he only knew how ardently I love him yet! I could not have been capable of the all-powerful love I bear him now at the time you have been telling me of. Strange I can remember nothing of that time. But leave me now, please, dear. Come, kiss me good-night. You have plaited my hair so smoothly,—what a sweet little maid you make!"

So Nellie left her, well satisfied with the way the day had ended, after all; for she was a staunch friend of Don's and would have gone any length to secure his happiness.

Although all partings are sad, yet, apparently, it was a gay party that met at the depot the next morning to see the girls leave for the West. The debonair Vasey was overflowing with exuberant spirits. Winfred, of her own sweet will, made the opportunity to ask Don:

"Now, Mr. Gilbar, promise you will come West to see me"—with the very slightest emphasis on the "me"—"very soon; and you know you promised papa you would come after Maud and Jack were married."

"Will you promise not to ask Vasey home with you, if I say yes?" inquired Don.



"The idea," retorted Miss Lykin, "of my having to offer a premium to induce you to come! Besides, you are determined, it seems, to prove to me you are selfish; so you wish me to be as lonesome and miserable as I can be when I get home."

"Oh, then you will be miserable without Vasey?" he said.

"Now, do not let us be disagreeable at parting, and if you will say you will come, why, I won't invite Lieutenant Vasey to go further than Chicago with us."

"Oh, you darling!" said Don, giving her a look far more expressive than words. "You may be sure I will come to see you at the earliest possible day. I think I can arrange matters to come before so very long, anyhow. Tell Jimmie to save a big, fat turkey for Thanksgiving day, and I will promise to be there and help to eat it."

This short colloquy put Don in the seventh heaven of delight; so that altogether, with two such capital fellows for leading spirits, there was an abundance of mirth and goodwill among the coterie of friends gathered to see the young people depart for their respective homes. Nellie promised to apprise Don of their safe arrival in Pleasantville, and thanked him, over and over again, for the happy time she had spent while a guest at his home.

"All aboard," shouted the conductor, as he signaled to his engineer to go ahead and, almost before they knew it, the train was moving slowly out of the depot. The last they saw of the gay party was the festive Lieutenant executing a number of pantomime gyrations.

"The fool," muttered Don, unable to entirely overcome his vindictive feelings, although he had gained his point and secured the promise that the young lieutenant should not be invited to go home with Miss Lykin.



## CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER week had passed, and the time had gone more quickly than might have been expected to Don. He had been kept very busy, aiding his father in preparing for that gentleman's departure. His heart was light, as the last few words with Winfred had filled him with hope. She was especially gracious toward him, and her giving up the idea of having young Vasey go on West with her was more gratifying to Don than he even cared to acknowledge to himself.

The second Sunday after the girls had left—they had started West on Saturday—found Don, about twelve o'clock, alone in one of the reading-rooms of his Club, scanning the morning papers, as he blew out great clouds of smoke drawn from his fragrant Havana.

"Not a thing in the papers this morning," he soliloquized. "They say the financial situation presents few special features this week; the stock market has been dull and drooping, because speculation is almost dormant on account, mainly, of the inability to foresee the outcome of the pending elections, the leading operators in Wall Street not wishing, under the circumstances, to make any ventures. Bah! when the papers don't know what else to say, then they write this. Still it is just about the state of affairs, and I don't see why I can't get away in two or three weeks. There will not be much doing this Winter, anyhow. Let's see. By George, I



ought to be getting a letter from Nellie. She promised to write at once, and if she did so, the letter should have reached me by yesterday or the day before. I believe I will send down to the post-office and have any personal letters there may be for me brought here; that's just the thing; wonder I hadn't thought of it sooner; such a day as this is enough to give one the blues."

It was storming fiercely outside, a drizzling rain that had started early in the morning having turned into sleet and snow, accompanied by a chilling Northeast gale.

Don, lowering his graceful limbs from the table upon which he had been resting them, stepped to the call box and rang for a messenger boy. "Hope I do get a letter from Nellie," he continued. "Blamed if I don't get kind of lonesome when I have time to think of it. Old Jack has gone and taken Maud with him, and I suppose it's because I miss them so, or something else. Well, we will soon see if there are any letters for me."

"Here, Johnnie," this to the messenger boy who stood waiting in response to the call, the water dripping from his rubber coat which protected him from the inclement weather.

"You skip down to the post-office and hand this note into window D; here is a dollar for you, and if you bring me any letters, I will make it as much more."

"Can't bring you no letters, Mister, if the clerk don't gimme none," answered the little urchin, as he seized the tendered dollar and scampered along the hallway.

In due time the lad returned, not empty-handed, but bringing a dozen or more letters for Don. Taking them eagerly from the boy, young Gilbar ran them over hastily.



“Here is one from DeAubray; he is worrying me to death to try some of his imported wines so that he can use my name as an advertisement. I am willing enough to drink his wine, but do not see the advisability of allowing him to make money out of my name; anyhow that will keep until to-morrow,” stuffing the letter into his pocket.

“This one is from Conway, ‘Call at your convenience, and have your coat fitted;’ that’s what it says, I know, without opening it. Well, Mr. Conway, DeAubray’s letter might get a little lonesome, so I will send yours to keep it company.”

Don scanned several of the letters hastily, until he came to a square and very unbusinesslike looking envelope. “Ah, ha! Something told me I would get a letter from Nellie; yes, sure enough, this is from her; here is the postmark, Pleasantville; that’s it. Well, we will just light a fresh cigar and get over here in the corner by ourselves and see what Nellie has to say.”

The balance of Don’s mail he did not even look at, but rammed all the letters together in his pocket, except the one from Iowa; this one he tore open leisurely and, seating himself in an easy-chair, began reading:

“DEAR MR. DON:— *We had a lovely journey home and found Jim waiting for us at the depot. He made a big fuss over Winnie, telling her what a stunner she is, in his extravagant manner. He seemed very glad to see me, too, and I came home with them and am still at the Squire’s. Papa will be down for me some time to-day and I am so impatient to see him that I can hardly wait. Lieutenant Vasey came clear on home with us, you know.*”

“The devil, what is that?” ejaculated Don. “Yes, that is what Nellie says; here it is, plain enough.”

“*Lieutenant Vasey came clear on home with us, you know, and Winnie and he have gone for a horseback ride and this gives me the time to*



*write you, as promised. I don't think the Squire was very well pleased at Lieutenant Vasey's coming with us ; but of course he is so delighted over having Winnie home that he doesn't say anything against her company. It may be that he cannot bear the idea of giving Winnie up to anyone, just yet——"*

And so the letter went on, relating the "lots of fun" they had *en route* to Pleasantville ; and it seemed to Don about every other word was Vasey.

"Well, if this isn't a great way of doing !" said Don, after he had finished the letter. "Is Winfred a flirt? Was she deceiving me with her false promises to not let Vasey go home with her? I don't go one step towards Pleasantville, that is sure. I have put up with her imperious ways long enough ; but I must say, come to think of it, it is not very complimentary to me that she loved me so when she was not altogether in her right mind and now, as soon as she regains her reason, she uses me as a plaything.

"All right ; I hope she and Vasey will be happy."

Which, Don being human, was just exactly what he didn't hope.

Then he wrote a few lines to Nellie, thanking her for her letter and congratulating her on their safe trip, saying that he hoped she would return to New York some time as he would then see her again ; otherwise, he might not have that pleasure, for he never expected to go West, as the only trip he ever made in that direction had proved thoroughly unsatisfactory.

Having performed this duty, Don sauntered into some of the other rooms and entered into a spirited discussion as to the advisability and practicability of resuming specie payment, a question that was being agitated at that time.



All during the conversation and through the whole day Don was resolving in his mind to follow out his early instincts and never again have anything to do with a woman.

“Blast that girl!” he muttered, between his teeth, as he drove home late Sunday night. “My mind must have been weakened for the last year, no doubt on account of the rough handling I had that night out in Iowa. Well, I am glad I have come to my senses at last and that I can “with so much calmness contemplate her marrying that blamed fool.”

After he reached home and had thrown off his coat, he continued to congratulate himself in much the same strain.

“What a satisfaction it is to have the house cleared of a lot of silly girls! one can have a good deal better time with the fellows. Why, I have hardly been in the Gymnasium since I came back to the city. Let me see, is it possible I only rowed twice this Summer; one afternoon to try my wind and then, the next day, when I went in against Tom Roberts? He came very nearly pulling in ahead that day, too; I had him beaten, safe enough, when I seemed to go to sleep. My mind drifted away and I got to thinking of Jack’s sister, which must have been very weakening, and the first thing I knew, Tom was forging ahead. The boys guyed me a good deal, that evening; said I was getting old and stout. I will show them, by another season, that I am a better man than ever.”

Don kept up this running fire of comment until he retired and sank into a restless sleep.

The next morning he was at the office bright and early and, calling the chief clerk into his private room, he had



a long conversation with him, giving instructions how to make a few safe investments that would require no attention for some time to come.

After he had gone over the business in general and dismissed the confidential clerk, he lit a cigar and again permitted his thoughts to drift into their natural channel.

“No, sir; I have had enough of girls; one experience is enough for me; but I think I’ll take a trip out to old Squire Lykin’s and see if I can’t find some good shooting this time. I like the old Squire and that Jim is a fine boy, too. I’ll be situated so I can really enjoy the shooting; my head will be clear, and it is only what I intended to do a year ago. Yes, that will be just the thing. Father is at the office every day and will be home for a week yet, so that he can attend to any little details that may come up; there is nothing to do here, anyhow.

“Let me see, if I stir myself, I can make the 5.50 Limited this evening, and that’s just what I’ll do. I’ll go home and pack my gun and traps and start to-night. I’ll take them by surprise, out there. Gad! I see myself now walking in and telling the old Squire I have come for a couple of weeks’ shooting.

“Of course, Miss Lykin will think that her sweet smiles have tempered the magnet that drew me West; but it won’t take long to disabuse her mind on that point; and Vasey and the beautiful Miss Lykin may gallivant about over the country for all I care; it is about all that Vasey is fit for, anyhow; I pity the country if it has to depend on such soldiers as he.”

Up to two weeks ago Don had joined and, in fact, led, the host of Lieutenant Vasey’s acquaintances in proclaiming him to be one of the bravest and best young



officers in the army; but, of course, we are all liable to change our minds.

Suiting the action to the word, Don rushed off home and told his father he was going away for a month, without any further explanation as to where or why he was going, only stating that he had left his future address at the office in case he should be needed. He hastily packed such articles as he would need and was ready two hours before the time of starting.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun was throwing its bright rays across the dining-room, one November morning, as the Lykin family assembled for breakfast. Outside, the atmosphere was sharp and bracing while the white frost covered the meadows far and near. The old Squire stood in the spacious bow window, looking out upon his vast acres with every evidence of satisfaction, while Winfred stood by his side, entertaining him with the recital of some amusing incident that had happened to her while riding the previous day.

The good old mother had seated herself at the table, almost entirely lost to view behind the smoking coffee urn. Nellie Miller was also at the table, as she had not yet gone home; her father was rubbing his hands, as he had just come in from the frosty air.

"Tolerable sharp out, this mornin', Mrs. Lykin," Miller said, "but it's going to be a fine day, and Nellie and I will have a fine drive home."

"Yes, I guess it is pretty cool out," replied Mrs. Lykin, and then, impatiently: "Do come, Hugh, sit down to your breakfast; everything is getting cold. Come, Winnie, what are you and your father talking about, anyhow?"



"But, mother," asked Winfred, "oughtn't we to wait a few minutes for Lieutenant Vasey!"

"Indeed, we shan't wait a second. Let my breakfast get all cold waiting for that lazy beau of yours? He knows our time for breakfast and if he was any gentleman he would be here at the proper hour."

"I just caught something about the proper hour," said the young gentleman referred to, as he came hastily into the room. "I suppose, Mrs. Lykin, you were saying something about this being the proper hour for eating breakfast and not for sleeping. You see, we soldiers are not accustomed to regular hours; we sleep when we can, and eat when we feel like it, provided, of course, we have anything to eat."

"I know I impose on your abundant good nature, and it will serve me right if you tell me some morning I must go without my breakfast; but you are too good to us boys."

This soothed Mrs. Lykin's ruffled equanimity.

"Where is Jim?" asked Nellie, as they all seated themselves at the table.

"There you go, Nellie. You and Jimmie quarrel and contend with each other the whole time you are together, yet you are the first one to miss him and can't seem to bear to have him out of your sight." This from Winfred.

"Why, Winnie, what a story! We never quarrel. Sometimes we try to explain things to each other, and it is so hard to make Jim understand; besides, I don't care where he is; I simply inquired, just as you did a little while ago for Lieutenant Vasey."

This was returning Winfred's fire in good order, but the shot must have gone wide of its mark, for Winfred only laughed as she turned to Vasey and opened the conversation with him by saying:



“ See how I look after your interests when you are not here.”

“ Jim rode over to town for the mail and one or two little things I needed,” Mother Lykin replied to Nellie’s question ; “ but it is time he was back by now ; ” and, almost as she uttered the last word, Jimmie came in and joined them at the breakfast-table.

“ Pretty heavy frost this morning, Squire,” Jim began. “ Well, that’s what you want ; I suppose you will be shucking your corn in a few days.”

“ Where are your manners, Mr. Lykin ? ” asked Nellie, determined to be noticed. “ It seems to me a gentleman would at least say good-morning to ladies at the table, before entering into a personal conversation, especially about business.”

“ Oh, pshaw ! Nellie ; mother was busy, and I couldn’t interrupt Winnie, as you see she is talking, and of course we men don’t always notice little girls.”

“ Did you get me a letter ? ” asked Nellie, biting her lips with impatience.

“ That’s so. By George ! I believe there is a letter for you ; I left the mail all out in my coat, in the hall.”

“ Oh, did you get me a letter ? Who is it from ? ”

“ Well, that is a great question to ask, I must say. You are about as dumb as they generally make them. Now, how should I know who your letter is from ? ”

“ Didn’t you notice the postmark ? and is it from a lady or gentleman ? Did it seem to be a big, thick letter ? When did it come, Jim ? ”

“ Oh, please stop bothering me ; I’ll go get you your letter right now, so I can eat my breakfast in peace.”

This Jim did, and, upon handing the letter to Nellie and her eye lighting on the little round stamp with the



words "New York" in the corner, she said, below her voice, and speaking to herself :

"It's from Don."

It must have been by intuition that Winfred caught the name, as the words were spoken too low to be heard across the table. In the middle of a sentence she paused in her talk with young Vasey and, try as she would during the remainder of the meal, she was unable to carry on a connected conversation.

What was in that letter? Was Don well? When was he coming? Did he speak of her and of being lonely without her? Why could not she have a letter from Don?

These and like thoughts chased each other through her mind, and it was with a great sense of relief that she finally arose from the table and was permitted to join Nellie, while they retreated to Nellie's room, where she could hear the substance of what Don had written.

"Was your letter from anyone I know?" asked Winfred, as soon as they had seated themselves at the window.

"As if you didn't know! Of course, it's from Don, and a miserable letter it is. Here, read for yourself, Winnie," and Nellie took the crumpled epistle from her pocket and handed it to her.

There was perfect silence for the little time it took Winnie to read the short note; then she said:

"What in the world did you write him, Nellie? He must have heard something that has put him out."

"Why, I wrote him the nicest kind of a letter; told him we got home all right, had lots of fun and a good time in general, coming through; and, I don't know, not much else; said you and that Vasey were enjoying yourselves. That's all, and I'm sure——"



“Oh, you wrote him that, did you?” interrupted Winfred. “That explains it all. You had no business saying a word about Lieutenant Vasey; you know as well as I do that I never asked him to come home with us; that I did all I could, with common decency, to prevent his coming, yet he stuck right along. I could have explained all this to Don when he came, but now you have spoiled it all.”

“Well, upon my word, if that isn’t mean of you,” retorted Nellie, “to talk so to me. I have been your friend from first to last, and now to have you turn on me for just telling Don you were out riding with the lieutenant; but I am glad I wrote it, for he ought to know just how outrageously you are flirting with Vasey—that is, if it is nothing more serious than a flirtation.”

“Nellie Miller, how dare you?” cried Winfred, stamping her foot. “But excuse me, Nellie; you are too young and silly for me to be provoked at you; if you will excuse me, I will leave you.”

And Miss Lykin walked majestically out of the room, it is true, but her eyes were filled with unshed tears and, as soon as she was alone, she gave way to what was, in all probability, the first good cry of her life.

What would Don think, after her promising she would not invite Vasey home with her, and then for Nellie to write that he was there and that she was enjoying his visit? How false she would seem to Don; and he was so anxious that the lieutenant should not come! And now, what was to be done; should she write and tell Don just how it all came about? No, that would not do; perhaps he really did not care and only wanted some excuse for not coming; but then again, what if he meant just what he said and she should never see him again.



A vigorous knocking at her door broke off Winfred's tangled thoughts.

"Are you in there, Winnie? What you got your door locked for? Come, open it; I want you. You can't guess who is downstairs?" Jim rattled this off in his usual style, as Winfred let him in.

"What is this? crying, and all by yourself? That don't pay; a girl always wants to wait until someone can see her cry; there is nothing in going off by yourself to cry.

"But this sort of business must be stopped, anyhow. has anyone been abusing you? 'cause if they have, just let me know and I will soon settle them. But guess who's come? You couldn't guess, if you lived to be a thousand years old."

"Not much use to try, then, Jimmie," said Winnie, smiling, for Jim's hearty ways were always infectious and no one could be low-spirited in his company.

"Well, just give a guess, anyhow, just for fun," he urged.

"I can't; tell me, Jim, who it is."

"Well, it's Don Gilbar."

"Who?" cried Winnie, throwing her arms about Jim and giving him a big hug. "You dear, darling boy, are you only teasing me?"

"I said Don was downstairs, not that I was Don," protested Jim, as he struggled to free himself from his sister's embrace.

Why is it boys never care for their own sisters' caresses?

"Don't try any of your bear antics on me; but, by George! I am onto you now, Winnie; I always thought it was the 'Regular!' Oh! oh! so it's Don that gets you so excited. Well, Winnie, go in and corral him, if



you can ; he is the best catch in the woods and Vasey is a ' scrub ' beside Don."

" But, Jimmie, it is not possible that Mr. Gilbar is here ; for as I told you, he was not expecting to come for a couple of weeks or so ; besides, he wrote Nellie, in the letter she received this morning, that he might not come for some time. I believe you are only playing a joke on me, after all, you rascal."

" Not a bit of it," Jim assured her. " Don is downstairs, safe enough, this very minute ; come on down and see him. We were all struck dumb, ourselves, when he came walking in on us. Go on down, Winnie, while I hunt Nell up."

" Did Mr. Gilbar ask for me ? "

" No, I don't know as he did ; he had no time to ask for anybody as we all surrounded him, and gave him such a hearty welcome ; but that is nothing. Thunder ! you don't have to wait to be asked out here, as you do in the city. Just go down and tell him you are glad to see him."

" Well, go on and find Nellie, Jim," was all she said, as Jim started out to surprise Nellie no less than the rest had been.

Miss Miller hardly waited for Jim to have the words out of his mouth that Don had come, before she ran unceremoniously down the broad stairs to greet the unexpected arrival.

" Well, this is a surprise ! " she cried, as Don shook hands with her. " You must change your mind as you do your coat, Mr. Don. Why, I have hardly finished reading your letter, in which you say you are never coming to Iowa, before I find you standing right here before me."



"I suppose I am growing dyspeptic, or something," laughed Don. "When I wrote you that letter I meant just what it contains; but I got to thinking, the next day, that I would enjoy a good, old-fashioned hunt, and not having an over-abundant supply of friends in the game districts, I thought my best opportunity would be to come and impose on our good friend, Lykin, here."

"As if I didn't owe Gilbar a month's entertainment," chimed in the Squire; "he's just here in good time. Game is plenty and I will take the field with him, myself; and if we don't bag our share, it will be something strange."

"Come along home with us," was Mr. Miller's hearty invitation. "You will find any quantity of prairie chickens up our way and I think we are in your debt for kindness shown to Nellie, here, more than anyone else. We are going to start home right away and can stop in town and get your traps; then the Squire can come on up to Stephen's and we will all put in a week's shooting."

Up to this time not a word had been said about Winfred, nor had she put in an appearance. Lieutenant Vasey was also conspicuous by his absence. "They are off riding together somewhere," was Don's mental decision in regard to the two who were uppermost in his mind.

Of course Don had come West for the sole purpose of enjoying the shooting, and that being the case, why not go along up with Mr. Miller as undoubtedly the sport would be just as good there as anywhere? Yet, for some reason, Don waited and, if the truth were known, was earnestly hoping that the Squire would urge some objection to his leaving.

It is very doubtful if the Squire would have done this



had not Nellie, with a woman's quick intuition, decided that there was something for Don to do of vastly more importance than killing the innocent prairie fowls; and, now that he had come so many miles in order that he might be near Winfred, which she knew so well was his prime object in coming, it would never do to take him where he might not see her. So she said:

"Now, papa, let us wait awhile. Mr. Gilbar is tired from his journey and should rest a few days; besides, it has been so long since I have seen you and mamma that I want to enjoy you alone for a few days and not be compelled to entertain company."

This pleased them all. Old Miller was flattered by his daughter's evident tender affection, Don gave her a mute look of deepest gratitude; while the Squire, taking the cue from Nellie, insisted that Don should stay with them for a while, anyhow.

Half an hour later Winfred came out into the yard to bid the Millers good-bye, as they were starting for home, and there she met Don.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Gilbar? You have taken us a little by surprise; but you are none the less welcome for coming sooner than you promised." She greeted him thus, cordially, without a tremor in her voice.

"Ah, good-morning," said Don, with a Chesterfield bow. "Yes, I found I could get away; so I thought I would take a run out here, for the shooting, before the game became too shy, which it will later on. I trust you are well, and your friend, Lieutenant Vasey, is he not with you?"

Don spoke with perfect self-possession, and succeeded fairly well in concealing the thrill of ecstasy that passed over him as he barely touched her tapering fingers.

"Oh, Lieutenant Vasey! I believe he has gone to



examine a horse that he wishes to purchase ; but it is time he returned, and he will be very much pleased to find you here."

"That is possible," muttered Don, "as I shall not interfere with any of his plans or amusements."

There was no time to continue this conversation. In a short time the Millers started for home, and the old Squire monopolized Don, taking him over the place and showing him the stock.

After this day the gentlemen had some good hunting for a week. Don was a crack shot and could hold his own with the huntsmen, even though they were on their "native heath."

Winfred, exasperated at his studied indifference towards her, was especially gracious to Lieutenant Vasey. While this young officer really was not in a position to do himself justice, he was madly in love with Winfred and, so far as she would permit, followed at her heels, like a shadow. A dozen times a day it was upon his lips to declare his love ; but she, divining each time the approaching crisis, froze the words upon his lips with her stately dignity ; but, at other times, she was so gracious that it kept the poor fellow in a mild form of delirium.

Some days he started, with the others, to the fields ; but he could not remain away long, in his present state of mind, so that invariably he would return long before the day was over. This naturally lowered him in the estimation of the others, whereas, under ordinary circumstances, he would have competed with the best of them for sportsman's honors, and enjoyed the rivalry, too.

He had applied for and received a slight extension of his furlough ; but, as there were prospects of trouble with the Indians, he one day received orders to report for duty



not later than a week hence ; so it was arranged that Winfred should give a ball on the night before he must leave.

The Squire was in for this, heart and soul ; he had intended, as soon as Winfred came home, that she should have a "big party," as he expressed it, and he didn't care how soon ; he also insisted that it should be as fine an affair as could be gotten up, regardless of expense.

So the news went abroad that there was going to be a big ball at Squire Lykin's, the first that had ever been given under the Squire's roof.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE girls will be terribly cut up if you don't go, Don," said Jim to young Gilbar the day before the ball; "they are counting on you, I am sure; then, besides, the Squire would feel almost insulted if you kept out of the way. What is the matter with you, anyhow, Don? Don't you like girls or being around where they are?"

"Not much, Jim; they are a deceitful, heartless lot and the less you have to do with them, the better for you. However, so far as I am concerned, honors are about even between us, for the ladies think I am a worthless bear of a fellow."

"That is just where you are off, Don; I'd part with Ben, the best colt in the State, if Nellie cared as much for my whole body as she does for your little finger; but certainly I wouldn't give in to her, or let her know it. Then there's Winnie, of course I'm not saying anything, but if you would only go in and run that soldier out, you would confer a lasting favor on the whole family. And you could do it easy, Don, for I know a thing or two; but I'm not saying anything."

"You will say a great deal too much if let alone," Don said, with a laugh; "but you don't know what you are talking about. I will see about putting in an appearance to-morrow night, though, to be sure, if the Squire is counting on me, I will be right there; you know I stick to the Squire, no matter what the game is."



“ Well, the Squire is counting on you, because I heard him say so ; and besides, he would think the whole affair a failure if you were not on hand ; and then, too, it would look like you went away on purpose.”

“ Oh, I guess you will see me around part of the time, anyhow,” Don finally assented, as he started across the fields with his gun and dogs.

Don had made a brave struggle, ever since his arrival, to escape any private interview with Winfred ; he had hunted and shot with a calm desperation. He was not aware, himself, how deeply he loved the girl, but the hot fires of love were burning fiercely in his breast, covered up though they were with his feigned indifference to her actions. Each day, however, increased the danger of the flames bursting through the thin crust and spending their force on the impenetrable walls of Winnie’s heart ; or, should they find an entrance open susceptible of their invasion and something therein to feed upon, they would glow and break into a light that would illuminate the whole surroundings of their two lives.

Winfred would have at any time been only too glad to recount to Don how Lieutenant Vasey happened to be a guest at her home. She was anxious and sought for opportunities to set herself right with young Gilbar on this one point ; for she felt that he believed she had wilfully deceived him in her promise not to ask Vasey home with her. On this point, however, matters seemed to be going from bad to worse. Don treated her with simple courtesy, passing the time of day with her as they met, but permitting nothing more ; while Lieutenant Vasey made open love to her in every way save putting it in words.

Up to this time, by exercising a great deal of tact and judgment, she had kept the poor fellow from making any



declaration and it was her greatest hope that he would go away without speaking the words that her woman's intuition told her were so often trembling on his lips. In a way she liked him very much and for this reason she wished to save him, if possible, the mortification that would be added to his disappointment should she be forced to give him the only answer that she could to his pleadings for her love.

But there remained only another day and night and then Vasey would be gone and, in the excitement of his soldier life, he would soon forget her, or at least only remember her as affording him a passing pleasure.

The preparations for the ball, although quite extensive for the time and place, did not require so long a period for completion as they would have done in a large city; there were no days and weeks of patient toil and long-suffering on the part of the belles who would be present in selecting dresses, having them fitted and draped, matching trimmings and all the fatiguing mental and physical exertion incident to a fashionable society girl's robing herself more magnificently than her rival.

It only required a few days for Mother Lykin, with the efficient aid of her most intimate neighbors, to prepare the wholesome viands that would appease the hunger of the guests, many of whose appetites would be sharpened by their long drive through the frosty air.

Nellie Miller came down a couple of days before, to aid in decorating the rooms and enjoy the additional pleasure of being on the ground and anticipating the conquests that she would make among the farmer lads. If anyone had had time to notice, it would have been laughable to note the thousand and one excuses that Jim made to get in the house and have a tilt with Nellie.



After Don left him, he busied himself for an hour or so with some work that could not be slighted. As soon as it was done, however, he hunted up the girls.

"Seen anything of Vasey?" he asked, as soon as he came in sight of them, for the double reason that he must say something and because he hoped the question would direct their attention from himself, and he would thus escape their asking him what he wanted. As a matter of fact, he did not want anything, and it was equally true that where Vasey was did not interest him in the least.

"Oh, he is packing his goods and chattels," answered Nellie, "preparatory to his departure; you know he leaves early day after to-morrow morning and he will have no time to pack after the ball."

"Jim, for a wonder, we want you; this is one time your company is very acceptable. Winnie and I want to do something and we can't by ourselves. Come, will you help us? and I will promise to dance the most with you to-morrow night."

"Oh, botheration, you are up to some of your tricks again," said Jim, suspiciously; "I can see it in your eyes; you want to have all the fun and fix it so I will get all the blame."

"No we don't, do we, Winnie? It is just a little pastime."

"That is all," coincided Winnie, "and we wouldn't allow anyone to harm you, anyhow, poor little fellow."

"Come on," continued Nellie, taking him by the arm, "Winnie wants you to get Don's repeating rifle."

"Get Don's rifle?" cried Jim, "what does she want to do?—shoot herself because Vasey is going?"

"Yes, that's it; what a smart boy you are, Jim," said Winnie.



"No, but we are in earnest, Jim," Nellie assured him ; " we want to shoot it ; Papa's and your father's rifles are so long and heavy, while Don's is such a beautiful gun. Come, Jim, let's go ; Don won't care, although he is so gruff himself, of late ; but we wouldn't ask him."

"Well, I don't care, if you want to. Don told me to use his things whenever I wanted to, so I am not afraid of his not liking it."

So they repaired to Don's room and were quickly interested in looking over his hunting paraphernalia. There were several guns, but the rifle was his pride ; everything about it shone like silver. Then there were beautifully wrought game-bags, his cartridge belt, blank cartridges, with appurtenances for filling the same, little cans of shot and powder. And then, his little tool chest was of especial interest to the curious girls. It was filled with chisels and screwdrivers, punches, wrenches, copper wires and screws and numerous other articles, for Don, knowing that he would not find a gunsmith near at hand, prepared himself for any emergency. Jim felt his importance, explaining the use of one thing and then another.

"But what is this for?" asked Winfred.

"Let me see it," said Jim, taking the instrument and examining it. "Oh, that is to test powder ; here, let me show you ; hold out your hand a minute," and, spreading out a little powder mixed with acid in Winnie's palm, which she extended unsuspiciously, he pressed the die firmly down.

"Don't, that hurts," cried Winfred, "I don't see what that has to do with the powder."

"Don't you," said Jim, laughing heartily. "Well, you see, that powder is guaranteed to stand a certain pressure without exploding, and as it didn't explode, it is good



powder. But come on, if you want to shoot some, let's get at it before Don comes back."

"Well, we are ready," said Nellie.

None of them noticed, not even Winfred herself until later in the day, the result of Jim's practical elucidation of the use of one of Don's tools. Winnie simply brushed the powder loosely from her hand and followed them out into the yard.

When Don returned at twelve o'clock, he found them still amusing themselves with his rifle. As he drew near, Nellie, who was shooting, hit the little card which was stuck in the end of a twig a little distance off, fair and square.

"Bravo," he cried, "you didn't shut your eyes just before you pulled the trigger that time, did you, Nellie?"

"I never do," she retorted. "But you have caught us in mischief, haven't you, Mr. Don? Are you cross at us for taking your rifle?"

"No, indeed," he replied with a pleasant smile; "you are welcome to anything I have that will afford you amusement, and, as I am so much less entertaining, personally, than some others," (this with a swift glance at Winfred), "I am only thankful that I possess something that can furnish you ladies a pastime."

"Now, Mr. Gilbar, that is neither kind nor just," Winfred interposed. "No one can be more entertaining than you; but I fear the trouble is that we are bores to you, judging by the way you so studiously keep out of our sight."

"But we do not intend to let you escape us to-morrow night, so prepare to make a martyr of yourself. Papa has been so kind in going to all this trouble for me that I hope I can tell him after it is all over that it has been the



happiest time of my life. There will be so few good dancers, and you know how hard it will be to attempt to waltz with some who will be here. Jim and Nellie have arranged, between shots, to monopolize each other's company at the ball, so you must come to my rescue."

All this was very pleasing to Don, coming from the one he loved so earnestly. This was really more than they had said to each other since Don's arrival, and there was no disguising the fact that he was flattered by her manner and prettily spoken words.

"And what about our young officer? I should have supposed that before this time you and he had also arranged to monopolize each other," Don replied, unable to keep the pique out of his voice. "Where is Vasey, anyhow? It is something unusual to find you without your shadow?"

"Lieutenant Vasey is arranging for his departure. I certainly appreciate his kindness and attention since we came home. Dear me! what should I have done but for him? Yet he will go in a few hours now and forget all about me. No danger of his ever startling me almost to death by his coming so unexpectedly to see me; never fear but that he will be able to keep away from me longer than two or three days; but when he does come, you will not find his temper gaining such mastery over him that he will hardly speak a civil word to me."

While they were talking, they had strolled up the path into the orchard. The most of the fruit had been gathered, and the sharp frosts of the last few nights, pinching the leaves from the tender twigs, caused them to fall in great heaps and piles in every direction. It was a typical Autumn day; the yellow sun glowed through the smoky atmosphere; big flies hummed and buzzed through the



air, as though defying the near approach of their death; the bees floated lazily about, heavy-laden and exhausted with their persistent toil in laying in stores for the fast approaching Winter. There is a feeling of luxuriant indolence that comes over one on such a day and, as Winfred seated herself on a mossy stump and Don paused by her side, they certainly looked very comfortable; but Don's mind was far from being at ease.

"How very exasperating you are, Winfred."

"Oh, am I?"

"It seems unnatural for you to be such a vain, heartless coquette."

"You think me all that, do you?"

"How can I think you other than what you are?"

"You have been very fortunate in escaping my wiles until now."

"Oh, I don't know as you deliberately practice deceit, or plan to allure anyone."

"Then you give me credit for something."

"But how could you be other than vain, after all the court that was paid you in New York, drawing in with every breath the uttered words telling you how surpassingly handsome you are; drinking in with your eyes the admiring glances of every one who might be fortunate enough to come within the halo of your dazzling beauty. I acknowledge it is only natural that you should be cruel and heartless and blind to the torture you inflict."

"But, if all this is true, why did you rush into danger? why did you come in such hot haste all the way from the city here to suffer such agony?"

"Because I love you; because my life is aimless, it is nothing without you. From morning until night, and from night until morning I think of you. It was impos-



sible for me to stay away from you, darling. Can you not give me some little encouragement?"

"Encouragement of what?"

"That you will love me; that you will some day be my own, my wife."

"You poor, darling old Don, what a strange selection you, who have the world to choose from, have made for a wife!—an irritating, vain, heartless, deceitful, cruel, worthless coquette. Are you only jesting, Don, or are you really in earnest?"

"I could not possibly be more in earnest," he cried eagerly. "I mean every word I have said—that is—you don't understand me."

"Oh, yes, I do; I have understood you all along and, if you are not afraid you will be disappointed, for I do not see how I can be everything that the girl you have just told me you love is; if you will promise not to scold me if I happen to do something good once in a while I, will be your wife whenever you will it."

There was a hurried caress, and unspeakable love sparkled through their eyes, as Jim and Nellie were heard coming through the leaves, contending, as usual, over some minor matter that neither really cared a rap about.

"See that you clean that gun up, Jim," said Don, with commendable forethought and control over his agitated feelings.

"Oh yes, I will clean it up so that you would never know it had been used. We thought you were half through dinner by now; come on, you'd better hurry up, or mother will be raving."

After dinner, Winfred and Don made another opportunity to be alone for an hour, during which time Winnie made a full and satisfactory explanation to Don as to how



Lieutenant Vasey insisted on coming home with them. She did not deny that Vasey was very good company and very entertaining, but she could not have the least particle of love for him. Then Don told her of the beautiful vision that was presented to his eyes when he awoke to consciousness after he knew not how long a struggle with the fever, not quite a year ago. He recited many incidents that occurred during his sojourn with the then strange girl,—incidents that he so loved to dwell upon.

“Well, Don,” she said at last, “you think I made you so happy then; I will try to make you far more so from now on. Let us make a thorough search for this cave, I should so love to see it; and perhaps the past will come back to me there. But I must go now, as there are many things to attend to before to-morrow night.”

The following day was quite blustering, the air was filled with snow, until by night the ground was covered with the spotless flakes. The uncertain weather, however, did not deter a majority of the guests who were invited from coming, each one bent on having a jolly good time.

By ten o’ clock the festivities were at their height. Miss Lykin had opened the ball with Mr. Gilbar, much to Lieutenant Vasey’s chagrin and the delight of all the others. Every one by this time seemed well started. Winfred and Don had stolen into the green-house, but the night was too young yet for them to be left long undisturbed. Nellie saw them leaving the commodious parlor, which had been metamorphosed into a refulgent ball-room and, as she came up with them, having followed hastily, she broke in upon their low-toned conversation with :

“Come, come; this will never do. You heard the Squire



lay down the rule that there was to be no 'sparking' until after twelve o'clock, and that will be two hours yet; besides, Mr. Don, you have your name down for this waltz with me. Hear! It has begun already. Now do not try to take advantage of our intimate friendship and beg off, for I sha'n't excuse you."

"Nor do I wish to be excused," replied Don; "it is the dream of my life to waltz with you, Nellie. Will you return with us, Winfred?" he asked, as he proffered Nellie his arm to escort her to the dance.

"Thank you, Don, let me remain here. I do not care to dance this number, so it will be safer for me to remain out of sight."

As they left her, Winfred walked leisurely on among the fragrant flowers; she was so happy, she wished to be alone for a little time. Hearing footsteps approaching hastily, she turned to face Lieutenant Vasey. It was impossible, on the instant, to keep the feeling of irritation at being disturbed from showing in her face. She disguised the feeling quickly, however, with her peerless smile.

"I see I am not welcome," began the young lieutenant. "Winfred, why have you changed so toward me in the last twenty-four hours?"

He had never called her Winfred before. It was coming now; she knew it by this and by the expression of his excited eyes. In spite of herself, she became agitated and was powerless to prevent the outburst that followed.

"My darling, you must know how deeply I love you. I cannot believe that it is a surprise to you for me to tell you this; you must have read my heart for days. Love for you has been in my voice, my eyes, in my every action; it has been on my lips to tell you this a hundred times,



but I could not bring myself to speak. Now I must leave you in a few hours, and I cannot go without your telling me you love me, and your promise——”

“Hush, stop, Lieutenant Vasey; you must not speak to me so.” Winifred had found her voice at last, although she was visibly moved. “I have tried so hard to prevent this. Why could you not have understood——”

“But I can’t stop,” he excitedly interrupted her. “Why shouldn’t I speak to you so? Do you love anyone else? No, I cannot believe that; I have been too sudden; I have not realized that, after all, our acquaintance has been, so far, only of short duration. But tell me you do not love anyone else; let me go away with the hope that I can win your love; tell me I have not offended you.”

“Oh, no; you have not in any way offended me, Lieutenant Vasey. I wish it were so I could answer you differently; but it will be better for us both, and I am sure better for you, that we end this now, once for all. Here is my hand, that you may be sure that you have not displeased me; but the only answer I can ever give you goes with it.”

It was needless to say the words, with which she had intended to reject his suit for, as she extended her palm, they both saw at the same instant what Winifred had tried to efface, in every imaginable way, that which the acid had caused to make plain and for a time indelible, and which she had forgotten for the moment, in her agitation. There it was, showing in bold relief upon the delicate veins, just as Jim had unwittingly stamped it when he was, as he claimed, testing the pressure of Don’s powder. There was no mistaking the words as Vasey read:

PROPERTY OF DON GILBAR.



The balance of the stamp, "Return to No. — Fifth Avenue," was not discernible, as it had made only a slight impression which looked like a long dark line.

"What is this?" said Vasey, his face flushing with anger. "Are you jesting with me?"

"What you see was placed there in jest," replied Winfred, her face aglow with joy at the thought that she was indeed Don's; "but," she continued, "it is also nevertheless true. And now you know why you must never talk to me again as you have just done. I have plighted my troth to Mr. Gilbar; he has all my love; but I have to thank you for many a pleasant hour. You must soon forget this, Lieutenant. Do not be reckless. Go and do your duty, as I am sure you are capable of doing, and some day I hope you will really fall in love with someone who will be worthy of your noble heart. Come, it will be noticed if we remain here too long; let us return to the others."

"Please accept my most hearty congratulations," said Vasey in a trembling voice. He had been honest in his declaration and was much affected. "You will have a husband to be proud of. Please excuse me for being so rude as to permit you to return alone; I wish to bid you good-bye, here." And, raising her hand to his lips with the most respectful courtesy, the poor fellow left her; and it was many months before Winfred saw the young officer again.

It was almost morning before the last of the guests had departed. There was no question but that every one had enjoyed the evening to the fullest extent. Winfred had repeatedly urged Don not to be selfish, promising that after this night he should have her undivided attention; so she was able to make the heart of more than one rus-



tic swain beat high with pleasurable excitement, under the power of her gracious manners and dazzling beauty.

As the young ladies slept late the following morning, Lieutenant Vasey had taken his departure before they came down.

It was suspected almost at once, and was known positively in a very few days, that Don and Winfred were engaged, a state of affairs that gave unqualified satisfaction to all who were directly or indirectly interested. Don and Winfred, themselves, were hardly more delighted than the old Squire, whose cup of joy seemed to be running over.



## CHAPTER XIX.

FIVE happy, prosperous years, each more joyous than the previous one, have passed since the day Winfred promised Don she would be his wife. They were not married until almost two years later, as Don was kept closely engaged in business for that time, while his father was abroad, recuperating his health which had been much run down by years of exciting toil in building up his colossal fortune.

But they have been married three years now; have been around the world, basking in the sun of each other's smiles in every clime, until their love has grown to be a divine, worshipful devotion, one for the other. Rarely, if indeed ever before, has there been a union where both were so strikingly handsome; and the peaceful joy that is constantly beaming from their eyes enhances not a little their great beauty.

Don lost the sealskin sack the first Christmas after the ball, for Winfred could not at that time, and cannot even now, remember anything of her life when she and Don first met. They had found the cave; in fact, Don had purchased it, together with some hundred acres which he had fitted up into a beautiful park and built a large modern hotel upon the ground, enlarging and beautifying the entrance to the cave, until the place had become a very popular resort. Possibly they might never have



found it, surely not so easily as they did, had it not been for Peter Denney.

Peter had purchased a farm out a way from Pleasantville with the money Don gave him, and was leading a tolerably honest life. He was growing well-to-do in trading horses and trafficking in stock of various kinds. It was said that you could not depend on his word entirely, when he was making a trade; however, can it be called dishonest for one to prevaricate a little when trading horses? Peter could not be sure that this or that horse which he wished to exchange was sixteen or eighteen years old, so, to be on the safe side, he would claim that his nag was six or eight, no doubt because in his heart he was absolutely positive the charger was at least that old.

The very first time Don and Winfred started out to hunt the cavern, they came across this Peter Denney, and after he had easily guided them to the spot where the gypsies had camped the Winter before Minna had left them, it did not take Don very long to once more find the entrance. After that, they explored the cave often, together, and in the company of others; but its beauty was no less a novelty and surprise to Winfred than to the hundreds and thousands who visited it afterwards.

“Don,” she had said, “for your sake I wish more than I can express that I could call to mind the time you say this was our home; but it is no use, I not only cannot remember it, but I cannot imagine it true. It fills my heart with a warm gladness to have you assure me that here I once brought you back to life; that here I watched over you tenderly; and if my soul went out to yours at that time, if I loved you then, when I must have been denied the power of my will to control or direct my heart’s



affections, how convincing it is that some bond, *une passion*, unites us that will, in the light of perfect reason, amount some day, if we are not careful, to blind idolatry. Sweetheart, I have not the least concern about our love for each other ever waning ; what I fear is, we will love each other too much."

And now, after five years, Winnie's fears have almost been realized.

Dr. Lykin and his vivacious little wife have just run in to spend the evening at the Gilbar mansion. It is Don and Winfred's home now, a suite of rooms being reserved and always in order for Mr. and Mrs. Gilbar, although their occupancy of them does not average more than a month or two each year. They travel a great deal ; besides, Mr. Gilbar is now interested with Squire Lykin in a number of extensive cattle-ranches, and his greatest pleasure seems to be in seeing his immense herds scattered over the plains and witnessing the exciting spectacle of the cowboys "rounding up" and "branding," so that they spend much of their time West.

Mr. Gilbar kept his promise made to Jack, to the letter, and Jack has more money than he knows what to do with at all times. His mind being thus free and untrammelled, he devotes his energies entirely to his profession, and, more literally than ever, the name of the great surgeon is known throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Mr. Gilbar received the return he desired from Jack, for, only a short time since, the great financier had been in Washington, endeavoring to prevent the opening for settlement of some large tracts of land upon which he was feeding his great herds because, unless he could prevent this, he would be forced to seek new pastures at a great loss.



At first he had difficulty in gaining an audience as monopolists, in which class Mr. Gilbar with reason might have been placed, were not in much favor with the Administration then in power. But as soon as it was noised about that he was the father-in-law of the great surgeon, Dr. Lykin, his own individuality seemed to be lost sight of; and, instead of being forced to press his way in, he was sought after and made much of by every one, from the President down.

He soon had the *entrée* into the inner circles with so much prestige that he saw that his requests would be acceded to with very little argument, they being predisposed in his favor. So the wily old speculator changed his tactics and secured the assent of the rulers of the nation to allow the lands to remain as they were for an indefinite period by simple reasoning, instead of paying a good round sum, as he had expected to so gain his point.

Of course he stated that the lands in question were only fit for grazing and to permit hundreds of good citizens to flock there with the hope of even gaining a sustenance from the crops Mr. Gilbar said they could not raise, would be leading the people on to their ruin and destruction. This was his argument in substance, and as it came from Dr. Lykin's father-in-law, it was accepted without a question.

So the great herds with "L. and G." stamped on their left fore-shoulders were permitted to fatten in peace, due entirely, as Mr. Gilbar insisted, to the influence of Dr. Lykin.

When Jack and Maud were ushered into the room, they found Don caressing his wife as affectionately as if their honeymoon had just begun.



"Hollo, Doctor; come in," said Don. "Why, Maud, where have you been keeping yourself the last two or three days?" he continued, as he greeted her with the same brotherly kiss as of old.

"Oh, I just couldn't get over," Maud replied, after Winfred had greeted them both cordially. "Eugenie has caught a wretched cold and I had to play nurse. You know what the twins are, but you do not know how they ride over me; dear little things! Well, they take after their father, and he must have been one of the worst boys that ever lived," then, seeing Jack pretend to scowl, she added sweetly: "because he is so good now."

"Well, what have you decided, Maud?" asked Winfred, "are you going on to Jim and Nellie's wedding?"

"Yes, we have concluded to go. The doctor thinks that the twins are old enough to notice and enjoy it; then you know their grandmother has never seen them yet, so she is very anxious for us to come. I do not think the children will be much trouble, Eugenie has such perfect control over them, so we have finally arranged to go. That is really why we are over here to-night; to tell you this, and settle about what time we shall start, and whether Don or the doctor shall get the tickets and secure our apartments."

Maud was immensely proud of her husband, and delighted in calling and referring to him as "Doctor." She was one of the most fascinating little mothers one could wish to see; the years had added to her beauty; maternity also had added to her charms. She was the same spirited little woman that had so charmed Jack when first they met, and, although his mind was much engrossed with his profession, he never was so tired or pre-



occupied that he was oblivious of the bright smiles and cheering words of his little wife.

It took some little time to arrange the details for their trip West the following week, to attend Nellie Miller and Jim's wedding; and then Maud and Jack said they must get home, as it was a shame to keep the nurse up late while she was so far from being well.

"Don't be in a hurry," urged Don, "you will find they are all asleep by this time, anyhow.

"By George, that Jim is a captain! I enjoyed his visit on here hugely, and I assure you it was a rare treat to hear him tell about his expecting to be married; of course I expected it would turn out just so some day, but hardly for several years yet.

"Don,' he says to me one evening as we were sitting here smoking, 'you and Jack get along with the girls pretty well, don't you?'

"Oh, yes,' I said; 'what are you driving at now?' for I knew he had some reason for such a question.

"Well, you see,' Jim continued, 'Nellie and I are going to be married in the Fall, and it worries me a good deal thinking whether I can manage her or not. You see I have had the Squire on my mind ever since I can remember, and now, just about as I am getting him so that he lets me have my own way almost entirely, here I go and bring about an alliance that I suppose will cause me the same contention and struggle until I get her so she has a little judgment. I believe Nellie is more obstinate than the Squire, but still you know better how to take her, for she comes right out and says what she thinks, while you never can tell what is on the Squire's mind.'

"Of course I took it all in dead earnest, for you know



it is just Jim to a dot. He is not at all conceited, nor would he so impress one ; it is only his self-reliant, earnest disposition.

“ ‘ Now, you see,’ he continued, ‘ you and Winnie seem to get along just as easily, but it is because you have never had the care of a big farm on your hands, Don, and never knew what it was to have to manage things.’

“ ‘ That is so,’ I agreed, but I could not help smiling, as I thought how one day on ‘Change for Jim, where he might have millions of dollars at stake would worry him sick ; at the same time I appreciated the fact that business, so far as he had been forced to cope with it, was just as serious a matter to Jim as to any of the rest of us.

“ ‘ Don’t fret, Jim,’ I told him, ‘ you will get along all right, and I believe you will find Nellie very tractable. Do not be too hard on her ; remember she is young yet and a woman, and we men should remember at all times that there is a certain amount of yielding and giving up due to the gentler sex.’

“ ‘ It isn’t that,’ said Jim. ‘ You do not know Nellie as well as I do. About the amount of it is, as I have already found out, I just have to give in to her.’

“ I guess that will be about the way of it. Nellie will handle Jim without gloves, and that will be the reason he will always love and respect her.”

“ Really, Doctor, we must be going,” interrupted Maud.

“ I am ready any time,” he replied.

So, in a few minutes, Don and Winfred were again left alone. Don stretched himself out on the lounge, while Winfred sat down by him as she said :

“ Whom do you think I met at Mrs. L——’s tea this afternoon ? ”

“ I don’t know, I am sure. Who was it ? ”



“Major Vasey.”

“Oh, did you? Well, how is Vasey? I declare, I haven’t thought of him for two or three years; in fact not since he won his captaincy by his bravery about the time his general was murdered. Vasey always was a brave fellow; but, gad, didn’t I hate him at one time for about three months when I thought he was stealing your affections away from me? So it is Major Vasey now, is it? When was that promotion given him?”

“Only about two weeks ago he was promoted to be a major of cavalry. You see, he is Mrs. L——’s cousin, and at the same time he received his commission he was granted a furlough and is now stopping with Mrs. L——. He talked with me a long time, and I was so pleased to see that he could do so without any embarrassment, and to know by his manner that he had gotten over that affair, for the poor fellow did love me, I am sure of that.”

“That is not to be wondered at; I do not see how any one could help loving you,” Don said, as he gently drew her towards him.

“He told me all about his last adventure. You see, there has been a good deal of trouble from a band of ‘road agents,’ led by one Silas Starkey. They have been robbing and murdering for a year or more, and it had grown to be such a serious matter that a special order was issued, troops were called upon to protect tourists, and the government offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for the capture of this Silas Starkey, dead or alive.

“About a month ago Major Vasey (captain it was then) had some dispatches to carry about two hundred miles across the mountains. This duty fell to his lot, because a man of cool judgment and undoubted courage was needed for such an important service.



“He was well mounted and delivered the dispatches in good time. As he was returning to his command a few days later, about noon, he overtook a gentleman on a beautiful horse; and as the stranger seemed so entertaining and social, Vasey was much delighted with his company and rode the whole afternoon with him.

“At night they halted and prepared to pass the night together. From the stranger’s conversation and manners the major says anyone would have taken him to be a roving parson, of which he tells me there are several on the frontier. He was well versed in border life, although that was not unnatural for one of his cloth out there.

“The stranger was the one to suggest that they had better stand guard during the night, as they were in a section infested by robbers, naming the much-feared band that were committing such wholesale depredations; besides, there was danger from catamounts and other wild beasts. Vasey’s companion courteously insisted that he would himself first stand watch. So, quite early, Vasey wrapped himself in his greatcoat and blanket, for the nights are always cool in the mountains, and lay down to sleep. He was exhausted from his recent hard riding, and had almost passed into a restful sleep, when, for some unaccountable reason, he became wide awake, and, as he opened his eyes, a bright flash seemed to pass them. Being familiar with all kinds of danger, his first thought was to remain inactive until he knew more definitely what it was that threatened him.

“Glancing swiftly about, his senses all alert, he saw his unknown companion with his back turned towards Vasey, sitting by the campfire, passing his thumb over the keen edge of a long knife. It was the fire flashing on the bright blade that had shone in Vasey’s eyes. The next



thing, Vasey heard the stranger utter distinctly on the night air :

“ ‘I guess you will do, my beauty. Little does yon sleeping fool think that it is Silas Starkey standing guard over him ; but we will soon help him pass in his checks, and then there will be one less of Uncle Sam’s boys to take a chance at the ten thousand offered for Silas Starkey’s body.’ ”

“ Vasey took in the situation like a flash, and, coolly drawing his revolver, he cocked it, and, with his finger on the trigger, awaited developments. It was not in Vasey’s nature to take a man’s life without cause, but he was not to be taken unawares nor butchered in cold blood. So he lay perfectly still, awaiting Starkey’s next move.

“ The minutes and hours dragged slowly by, yet Starkey made no further demonstration until about midnight, when he suddenly arose from his seat by the fire, and, with two spoken words, ‘ Now, then,’ he raised his gleaming blade and strode swiftly but stealthily toward the (as he supposed) sleeping man.

“ One step more and he would have fallen upon his intended victim, burying the long, keen knife in Vasey’s heart, when the young officer suddenly flung aside his covering ; a sharp report rang out upon the still night and Silas Starkey was no more.

“ The next day Vasey rode into quarters with the famed outlaw dead across his saddle-bow. The reward was paid him, and his promotion quickly followed. Wasn’t that grand, Don ? ”

“ Indeed it was, darling, and Vasey is just the man that could do such a thing. I must hunt him up to-morrow.”

In his hearty words and honest face Winnie can rejoice



that all jealousy has passed from Don's heart, nor did the green monster ever enter there again.

This had been Winnie's only concern, as Vasey's name had scarcely been mentioned between them since the night she had shown the young lieutenant that she was the property of another and could never be his.

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Should you be on Wall Street almost any day about ten in the morning and notice a fine, large, distinguished-looking gentleman, with dark hair and eyes, step from his carriage and walk briskly into his office, nodding to this one or that (for there surely will be some one whom he knows passing at that hour, and he has a pleasant smile and nod for every one), you may be certain that it is Don. And if there is anything about his sojourn in the cave you do not fully understand, or if you don't know just where to find it, and should like to go there some Summer, just ask Don : he will tell you.

THE END.



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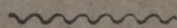








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